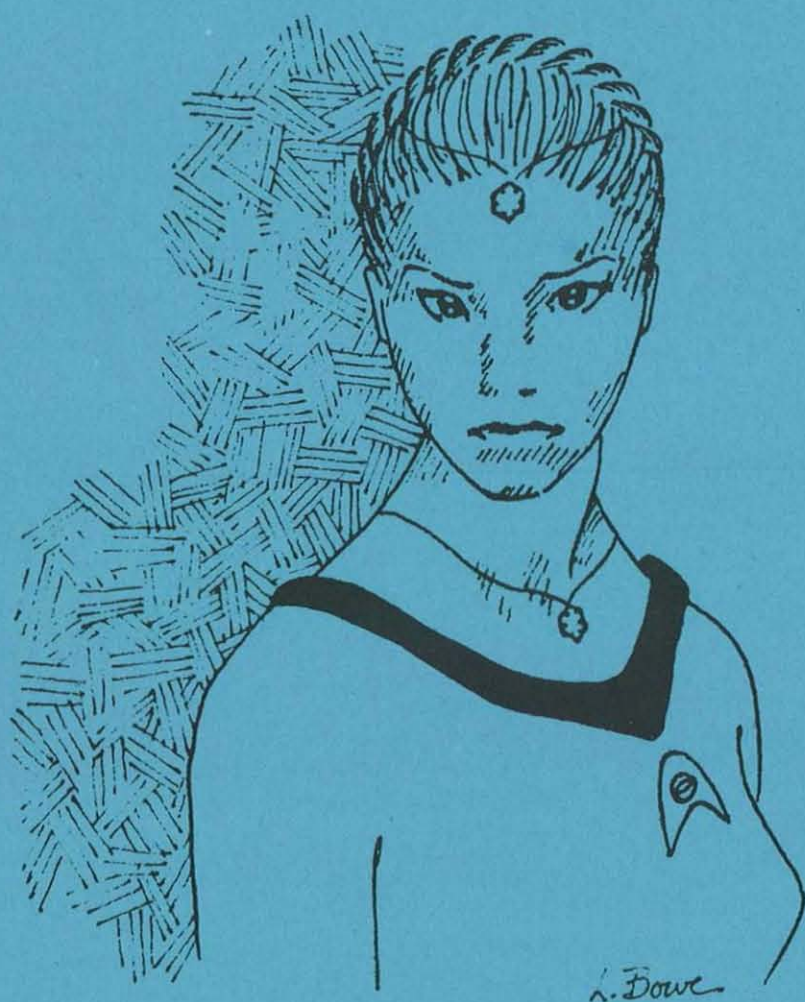


Scotpress

A CITY

WITHOUT WALLS



ALINDA ALAIN

a
STAR TREK
fanzine

A CITY WITHOUT WALLS

by

Alinda Alain

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A ScoTpress publication

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

FOREWORD

This is the third story in a series written by Alinda Alain. She has used the themes of a book (Bethany's Sin) and a TV movie (Amazons), and one of the Star Trek animated episodes, in developing the background of her characters.

The book and the film postulated a race of women who have developed extrasensory abilities and who, because of cruelty suffered over generations, hate men; they have in the past used men to father their children, then killed their husbands - and often their sons, too. In the book and the film, they were defeated, but their spirits survived to take over young girls and so their race continued.

Alinda picked up the idea at that point. She moved the women to a planet (Zamaria) far removed from Earth, decided that many of the women would begin to feel unhappy about killing their sons, and the race - still consisting mostly of women - has, by the time of Alinda's stories, begun to develop a culture that accepts men, although their men do not have the abilities the women do. Emigration from Zamaria resulted in the colonisation of Cygnet XIV at some time in the past; Cygnet XIV (which appeared in a Trek animated episode) is also a matriarchy which is a member of the Federation, and any Zamarian wishing to join Starfleet becomes a naturalised Cygnetian.

The energy barrier at the edge of the galaxy (Where No Man Has Gone Before) is presented as having been caused by them to provide a prison for those of their number who wanted to retain the old ways; and Gary Mitchell was changed, and given the abilities, simply by exposure to it. In this series, Mitchell did not die at the end of Where No Man...; he was taken by the Zamarians to their home planet, to be trained in the use of his new abilities and given the sense of responsibility that possession of them entailed. However, for various reasons, he could not adjust and remained a rogue talent.

The first story in the series, Gsazara, was actually the second printed and is still in print. It tells how the Zamarians first developed an interest in the Enterprise and her crew. The second story, One Among You, was the first printed and is now out of print. In it, Gary Mitchell kidnapped Kirk, and Spock, with the help of Zsazara (Gsazara's sister) sets out to rescue him; but although they defeat Mitchell, he has not been destroyed; and his jealous hatred of Kirk - and Spock - continues unabated.

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PROLOGUE

Sensing that he had fled far enough to escape the Zamarian's ability to find him telepathically, the entity that had called itself 'Gary Mitchell' during its mortal existence ended its flight, settled into a reasonably secure dimensional/state called limbo (for lack of any better term) and began to brood.

!! MY FRIEND, JAMES T. KIRK!!

Much bitterness, anger, and resentment swirled around that pronouncement. It recalled all too vividly to the entity's mind those long-ago days when he had been a Human being, when he had been a Lieutenant Commander and chief navigator of a Federation starship called ENTERPRISE, and best friend to its Captain.

!! MY FRIEND, JAMES T. KIRK!!

Then had come the contact with the Energy Barrier at the galaxy's rim which had changed him, increased his latent esper abilities so quickly and so powerfully that he lost all sense of kinship to his fellow-beings, even his own species, Humankind.

!! MORALS ARE FOR MEN. NOT GODS!!

But his three-year stay among the Zamarians, the creators of the energy barrier, had taught him the folly of such a statement. Morals were the creation of the gods. And none adhered to them more fiercely than the gods themselves. Or punished more severely a rebel in their ranks who wilfully violated those morals and those impossibly high standards.

"Above all, a god needs compassion, Mitchell!!!"

James Kirk's declaration and challenge stirred from the depths of the entity's memory to haunt and accuse him. Who did that puny little Human think he was to so condemn him? Why, with but a single idle thought, he, M'chel, could reduce James T. Kirk and his precious starship to a speck of dust.

!!M'CHEL!!

M'chel was the abbreviation of his mortal name 'Mitchell'. It had been given to him by the most beautiful creature in the universe, a black-haired, black-eyed goddess known as Gsazara. Oh, how he had worshipped her, and tried to win her love. Only her heart and commitment had been focused totally upon another. All his efforts to break that union had been frowned upon and refused, until finally he had dropped the facade of 'nice guy' and shown his true self at its very worst. He had used his newly acquired powers to hurt and to try to kill out of jealousy, envy and spite.

!!EXILE!!

That was supposed to be his punishment. That and a stripping from him of all his newly acquired esper powers. Only he had fled, escaping their sphere of influence before they could capture and bind him. And now...

!!REVENGE!!

...was his sole motivation, his sole purpose for being. He would hunt down and destroy any and everyone who had ever slighted him in any way, real or imagined. And what better people to begin with than his mortal acquaintances of long ago?

!!MY FRIEND, JAMES T. KIRK!!

His first target had been his former best friend and commanding officer. The Zamarians, as if anticipating his every thought, had sent one of their own to protect and guard the objects of his revenge. His efforts to kidnap and merge his mental self with the mind and body of James Kirk had been stopped - by the Zamarian guardian and...

!!THE VULCAN/HUMAN HALF-BREED!!

Spock. His friend, James T. Kirk, had replaced him with a pointy-eared, computer-minded biological freak.

!!BIOLOGY. VULCAN BIOLOGY!!

Oh, but a lot of trouble could be stirred up with a little subtle tampering and manipulation. It would have to be very, very, subtle so that the Zamarian guardian did not sense the cause and intervene again. But of even more importance to the entity was the thought of somehow damaging and/or distorting the legendary friendship now existing between Kirk and Spock, to the point where it could never be repaired.

!!VENGEANCE IS MINE, JAMES T. KIRK AND SPOCK OF VULCAN. AND YOU WILL PAY DEARLY. THIS I SWEAR!!

CHAPTER ONE

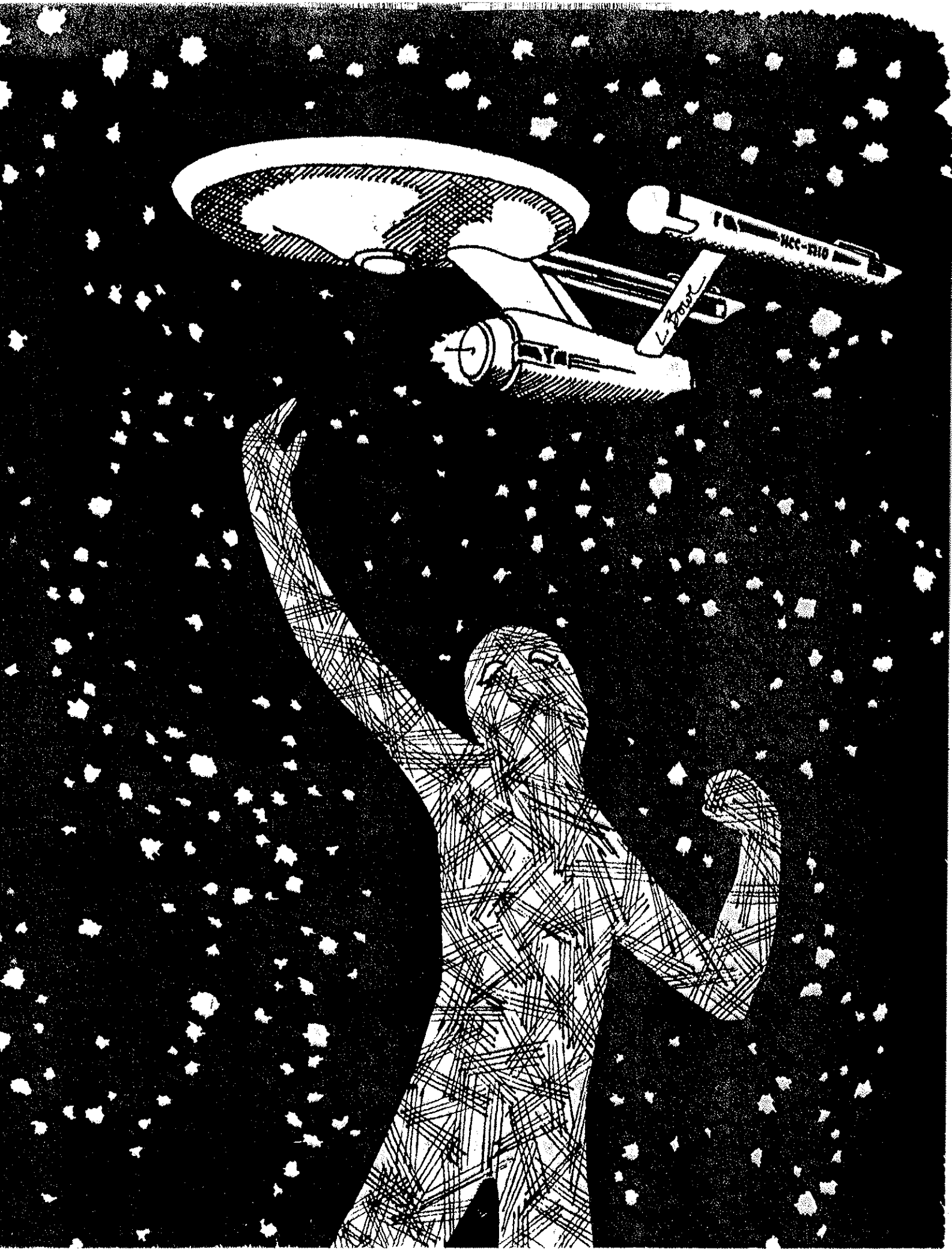
The stately silver starship warped through the vastness of space at a leisurely pace. Within its walls, in the Captain's quarters, James T. Kirk emitted a deep sigh and leaned back into his chair. "Two months down and ten more to go before it's mission's end - and home."

His First Officer, who stood at attention in front of his desk, automatically corrected his generalization down to the day, hour and minute.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," the Human grinned. "Your way makes it sound much longer. And a part of me is all for stretching out the time for as long as we can."

"Sir?" The Vulcan lifted a slanted eyebrow in puzzlement.

"Oh, nothing." Kirk waved a hand of dismissal.



But his Captain's idle comment had served to remind Spock of the stressful ordeal that the Human had been subjected to by an old acquaintance they had all believed to be dead and buried on Delta Vega. A situation that had been doubly difficult for Kirk because it had been at the hands of a man the Captain had once called friend. "Jim. Are you still having dreams foreshadowing the future?" the Vulcan asked with just a hint of concern in his voice.

Kirk shook his head. "No. But my memories of late have been unusually vivid. Almost as if I was actually reliving the experiences..." His voice trailed off, as he recalled Gary's attempt to take over his mind, body, and spirit. Abruptly, he decided enough was enough. "No more reflecting. Let's go to the gym." He rose to his feet. "I feel a need for a good, hard, rough-and-tumble workout. Will you be my partner?"

"Of course."

Together the officers left the cabin and headed for Deck 20.

Minutes later, Captain and First Officer faced each other on the exercise mats.

"They are quite an impressive pair, wouldn't you say?" Security Chief D'Lorraine Larzen commented to her gym partner, Ensign Zsazara Z/N.

"Yes. They are certainly that," the young Cygnetian agreed readily, allowing her dark eyes to follow the movements of the two men as they circled each other in preparation for a hand-to-hand combat exercise. Having spent most of her early childhood among her homeworld's natural predators, Zsazara still tended to perceive her current, more civilized associates in terms of the wild ones.

To her, the Vulcan, being tall, lean of muscle, quick and powerful, was like a Terran panther.

The Human, being more solid and compact in build, was like a golden lion. It was an impression that was especially so when one was attuned to the dynamics of his charismatic mind and personality.

Both, in their own individual way, were fine specimens of their gender, and the Cygnetian permitted herself to take pleasure in watching them.

"Easy, there, Zsa," Larzen's teasing voice broke into the Ensign's reflections. "I didn't think people like you were allowed to indulge in something so sensual and base as male-watching."

Zsazara pulled her gaze from the men to focus on her department's chief, who also happened to be her room-mate. They sat on the exercise mats doing warm-up calisthenics.

"'People like me'? And what would that be?"

"Oh, you know the type. Ultra-conservative. Religious fanatic. Puritan. Anti-everything."

Zsazara chuckled, amused. "Why thank you. If that's the way you see me, then I feel complimented."

"You would." Larzen retorted dryly. "Of course, you're a whole other person when you're riled."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. When you're mad you seem to radiate a field of crackling electricity. Very intimidating. Very effective. I had my doubts as to how well you'd do in Security when I first saw you. You just don't look the type."

"Look who's talking."

Larzen shrugged. "I'm pretty. I know that. But, unless I'm very conscientious, my mannerisms slip back into the tomboyishness of my youth, which is a real turn-off to most men. That, plus my height and the nature of my job."

"Did you choose this vocation or did it choose you, Dee?"

"With a father as Chief of Starfleet Security and nine brothers all in the business, your guess is as good as mine. But enough about me and my background. You're the mysterious one. You say you're from the female-dominant culture on Cygnet XIV, but there's more to you than that. What's the other half of your life story, that part of having to do with a group called 'Zamarians'?"

Zsazara sighed. She had yet to decide whether that one little slip of several weeks ago was for the best or the worst thing to have happened.

"I really do have Cygnetian citizenship."

"Which gives you access to Federation membership and entry into Starfleet. All well and good. But the question is: *why such an elaborate pathway?* The only logical answer seems to be that you really belong to a planetary society not a part of the Federation."

"Good guess."

"The next question, then, is: *Why doesn't this planet belong to the Federation?*"

"There could be a number of reasons. Incompatibility of the majority of its citizens with those of the Federation. Or... a very sordid, sadistic and violent cultural history that would shock and outrage most of the Federation's more civilized people. Or... something as simple as testing the social atmosphere and waiting for just the right time."

"Uh-huh."

Abruptly, Zsazara rose to her feet, her movement one fluid motion. Realizing that she had probably got as much information out of the Cygnetian as she was going to for the moment, D'Lorraine followed suit, albeit not as gracefully.

"You know, Zsa, there is one question that is circulating throughout the ship which you do need to address so as to minimize any embarrassing confrontations."

"And what is that?"

"Your sexual preference. I mean, being from a female dominant

culture with little or no men, one can't help but wonder. The stereotype, of course, is that all of you would be lesbians."

Zsazara nodded, understanding. "Our culture tried that route a few generations back. It turned out not to be very viable or satisfying. It's forbidden now."

"Forbidden?" That was a bit much for Larzen's liberated views to absorb. "How did you manage that?"

"It's a law that the citizens agreed to live by."

"And for those who choose not to live by it?"

"They live elsewhere now."

"Like another planet, I bet."

"You got it."

Before Larzen could think of a response to that, the Cygnetian suddenly went into attack mode. Without warning, Zsazara gripped her by the wrists and in spite of her best efforts to counter it, sent her flying through the air.

In another corner of the gym, Captain and First Officer feinted and attacked in their practice workout, their movements so co-ordinated as to seem choreographed. But as they parried, Kirk came to feel as if an odd tension was developing between him and the Vulcan. After many years of association, it was only natural that he and Spock knew the other's mindset and fighting skills, to the point that they delighted in trying out the new and unexpected on another.

Perhaps the Vulcan was deliberately projecting an aura of tension so as to distract him for a surprise manoeuvre. Kirk wiped the perspiration from his forehead, pushing back a damp lock of sandy brown hair. His eyes never left Spock, who circled about him with a quiet intensity that was unnerving.

Suddenly, a feeling of déjà vu washed over him...

It was a memory of Spock's Koon-ut-Kal-if-fee. The Vulcan's first pon farr, the TIME OF MATING. And the first time in his life he had known genuine fear - a fear like no other. A dread of not only losing his life, but of losing something infinitely more precious and irreplaceable.

SPOCK...?!!

His First Officer moved toward him, the burning dark eyes in the satanic face intent on murder.

Spock reached for the Human, his speed and precision that of a striking cobra. He locked his opponent's body in a hold with a strength that could break Human flesh and bone as easily as snapping a twig.

"SPOCK...?!!" A strangled voice croaked.

The ancient drives stirred, urging him to kill, to dispose of



this nuisance to his fevered senses. All he had to do was apply just a fraction more pressure.

"Spock..." This time the voice reached not only his ears but his mind and heart as well. Recognition dawned. "Spock. Enough. Too tight..."

"Jim." Shocked, the Vulcan realized what he was doing and to whom. Quickly, he released his grip.

Kirk sprawled backward on the mat, gasping for air. He looked up into Spock's eyes, hooded now by long, dark lashes.

"Captain..." The First Officer's voice was a strained, horrified whisper.

"It's OK," Kirk rasped hurriedly, forcing a smile. "I'm all right." He reached an arm toward his friend, requesting a hand up.

For a long moment, Spock stood frozen. Then, with great care, the Vulcan helped his Captain to his feet.

They stood facing each other, their gazes locked in a silent exchange.

/I'm all right./ Hazel eyes sought to reassure.

/No./ Dark eyes countered. And aloud: "No."

"Spock. I'm fine. It's OK. I was careless. But that's what workouts are for, to learn of one's weaknesses and devise safeguards against them. There was no harm done. Everything's all right."

"No, Captain. Everything is not all right," the Vulcan stated in a tone that heralded doom. And once he was sure that Kirk was able to stand alone, Spock released the Human, turned and quite literally fled.

Stunned, Kirk stared after his First Officer for a heartbeat before attempting to follow, but the room began to spin about him.

Larzen feinted an attack.

Zsazara pretended gullibility, then effortlessly flipped the Chief over her shoulder when Larzen tried to tackle her.

Larzen managed a controlled landing and lashed out with a leg to sweep the Cygnetian's feet out from under her.

Anticipating such a move, Zsazara leapt into the air, did a graceful somersault over Larzen, and landed catlike out of the Chief's reach.

"Not bad, kid," Larzen acknowledged, sitting up. "Not bad at all." Some of her silver-blond hair had slipped out of the severe bun style she wore when on duty. She tucked it back in place, out of her face. "You got a lot of power in that pint-size body of yours. Were you raised on a planet with high density gravity? Or are you like the superbeings of old Terran legends who always had some specially endowed talisman that gave them incredible powers?" Her blue eyes settled meaningfully on Zsazara's jewellery.

The tiny star-shaped crystals were called 'liahs'. They were powerful regulators of mental energy, and were best used in a set of five. A warrior normally wore one each on chains and/or bands about forehead, neck, waist and wrists. Of course, they were only necessary for warrior-apprentices since a fully trained warrior (known in the Sisterhood as a warrior queen) had no need of such regulators. However, many warriors still tended to wear them out of habit and/or for sentimental reasons.

Being a Z/N, Zsazara wore hers mostly for the latter, although there were several skills in the warrior's training arsenal which she admittedly had yet to fully master unaided.

"I'm a product of a little bit of both," she confided to Larzen.

"You know, Dr. McCoy is convinced that you're a genetic construct of some sort."

Zsazara shrugged noncommittally. She and the Chief began to circle warily, looking for an opening to exploit in each other's guard.

"By the way, you never quite answered my question earlier."

"What question was that?"

"What's your sexual preference?"

The Cygnetian took a moment to consider how best to answer. Most Humans had such strange perceptions of sex and its purposes.

"I'm not sure if I can explain it to you in a way that you could comprehend. At best you will pass my explanation off as the views of a... how did you say earlier, a 'puritan'."

"Try me," Larzen encouraged.

"Put simply: I'm not interested in it in any shape size or form. Occasionally I'm curious and in a few rare instances I play along with the social courtesies."

That surprised the Chief so much that she forgot about the sparring. "Then Sean was right. You were just leading him on."

Larzen was referring to Lieutenant Sean DePaul, one of the ship's navigators. The tall, dark and handsome blue-eyed Human was one of several men in the crew who had made an attempt to seduce Zsazara almost the minute she came aboard, barely giving her a chance to get settled in her new environment. Out of all the attempts, she had permitted his attentions the longest for no other reason than his willingness to court her.

"Ah, yes. Sean." Zsazara sighed and shook her head in regret. "I do owe him an apology. My behaviour toward him was very much that of the immature child."

"Meaning...?"

"Meaning that Sean was one of those attempts to be socially agreeable. I don't know if you Humans are aware of this or not, but most of you radiate a kind of social uneasiness when you can't quite categorize a person. It was as if I had but two choices upon my

arrival on this ship: take a male courting partner or be labelled and treated as a lesbian. It was as if the idea of my not being interested in either was totally beyond the comprehension of all of you. My efforts to become friends with Uhura, Christine, Shelly, and even you to a certain degree were met with polite refusal until Sean and I became a... 'couple'."

"Oh." Larzen winced, realizing that the Cygnetian probably spoke the truth. "What you're trying to tell me, and you want me to pass on to whoever may be interested, is that you are a practising celibate."

"A what?" Zsazara had never heard of the term.

Larzen explained.

"I didn't know such a word even existed in Terran society. I've always had the impression that you Humans considered any being that was not eager to have sex at every possible opportunity to be a mental case." Zsazara grinned. "Which only goes to show that stereotypes work both ways. My people see most Humans as sex-obsessed self-gratifying addicts."

"Well, we're not all like that," the Chief assured.

"Are you suggesting that perhaps I have misjudged Sean?"

"Heavens, no. That guy is the living incarnation of your people's stereotype."

"A pity," Zsazara murmured. "There were a few times when he really stirred my 'curiosity'."

For the first time since becoming acquainted with the Cygnetian, Larzen saw what had to be a look of teasing mischief in those dark eyes. "Zsa..."

"Yes, Chief?"

"When and/or if you ever become interested, I take it that it will be in a male."

"Of that you can be assured, Dee."

"Well, now that we got that settled, what do we talk about next?"

Zsazara seemed to consider a moment. "Ah... Since you brought it up, I could use some guidance in dealing with Sean."

"What?!"

"As I said earlier, I owe him an apology and..."

Abruptly, Zsazara broke off their conversation and charged toward Larzen.

For a split instance, Dee recalled their sparring match and tried to react, only to have the girl rush past her. Whirling about, the Security Chief saw the Ensign reach Kirk's side, just as the Captain began to collapse.

"Spock... " Kirk moaned, as consciousness left him.

The Vulcan fled to his quarters. Entering, he activated the lock and slammed a fist into the nearby bulkhead.

"No!" That which considered itself civilized within his soul, raged against this betrayal. "No. It cannot be. It is not time."

Spock staggered toward the bathroom, barely able to focus. It was not possible that this could be happening to him so soon - and so abruptly. Had he been among Humans so long that he had ignored even the most fundamental warning signs of his biological nature?

Humans! He was on a ship of Humans!

That realization hit him with such force that he almost cried out at the cruelty of fate.

M'chel, his presence carefully shielded against Zsazara's supra-awareness, felt to rejoice in the discord he had set into motion.

!!My friend, James Kirk. How I shall delight in seeing you and the half-breed turn on each other just as you each turned on me. Soon your First Officer will be a rampaging bull, attacking any and all that come within his reach!!

Ah, but revenge was so sweet...

CHAPTER TWO

Dr. Leonard 'Bones' McCoy looked up from his desk to see Larzen and Z/N hurrying into sickbay with a semi-conscious Kirk between them.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed, rising and coming over to them, the scanner already in his hand. The instrument showed internally two cracked ribs. Outwardly there were bruises and lacerations about Kirk's neck, shoulders and chest. "In here." He directed the two women (who held the Captain in a fireman style carry of interlocked arms supporting back and thighs) to the nearest diagnostic bed. "What happened?" The doctor noted that all three were dressed in workout fatigues. His piercing blue eyes fixed on Zsazara accusingly.

"Not I, sir," Zsazara responded, knowing that her superior strength was suspect.

The two security specialists settled their Captain gently on the bed.

"We're not sure what happened, Dr. McCoy," Larzen intervened. "Zsa and I were working out in one corner of the gym, while the Captain and Mr. Spock..."

"Wait a minute." McCoy's gaze shifted from the Cygnetian to the Security Chief. "You mean, Spock was with Jim when this

happened?"

"I don't know for sure, Doctor," Larzen answered. "My back was to them most of the time and my whole attention was on Zsa. Perhaps, Zsa..." The Chief turned to address the Cygnetian only to discover empty air at her side. "Now, where did she get to so fast? I swear by Jupiter's moons, that girl seems to move at the speed of light when she's a mind to."

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, Beautiful?"

The masculine voice caused Zsazara to stop in her tracks. She turned, surprised to see Lieutenant Sean DePaul walking slowly toward her from an adjacent corridor.

"Sean." Zsa greeted him as neutrally as she could.

"You didn't expect me to try coming this close to you, did you?" He spoke courageously, but made it a point to stop well out of arms' reach.

"I can undo the damage, Sean," Zsa offered. "If you let me."

"Oh no. You don't come near me with your witch's ways," the navigator accused. "Oh, does that surprise you? That I've been doing some research on your kind?"

"My kind?"

"Amazons. I've looked up every legend that's ever been written about your kind and they all have one thing in common. You hate men, and you take every opportunity to humiliate, cripple and kill us."

"Once. A long time ago." That, of course, was a little white lie, but Zsazara did not think it wise to tell him exactly how recently her people had 'changed' their ways. "It's not like that any more."

"Oh, really? Then why can't I make love to women any more? Dr. McCoy has tried everything he knows and nothing helps," Sean whispered bitterly, only to go deathly pale when he realized what he'd said aloud.

"Sean. I didn't know. Why didn't you and the Doctor tell me? I've never neutralized a male before." Zsazara was shocked. She started toward him, only to have him retreat in fear. "Sean. Let me..."

"Don't you come near me, you she-devil!" Sean snarled. "You... you..." Words deserted him. "Damn you! Damn you to hell forever!" he managed finally before he turned and fled.

Zsazara stood and watched him go. At first she felt nothing. Well, almost nothing. She was still Zamarian enough to feel the merest twinge of satisfaction at the thought of inflicting any kind of pain on her people's ancient enemy, Man. There wasn't a member of the Sisterhood of Warriors who did not have hundreds of stories to tell of a male's injustice, misuse, and abuse of womankind. Many spoke of such things as experiences told to them by their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers. But some (like the newer

members) had personal experiences to share. And it didn't seem to matter from what planet, culture, time or species that they came. The wounds, scars, and damages - be they physical and/or psychological - were always deep and ugly.

"And with all of that as your legacy, Sean DePaul, the only thing you can focus on is your inability to perform in bed." Barely suppressing her disgust, the Cygnetian turned away to resume her mission.

Zsazara took only two steps before she realized her folly.

"Fool. You can't go to the Vulcan in this state of mind. Not in his condition. You'd kill him."

Hurrying into a nearby alcove, the Cygnetian took a few seconds to call upon the disciplines of her Zamarian training in order to calm herself and to re-focus her motivations from their more base inclinations and onto the higher ones recently adopted by her people.

The fire-idol symbol of his family which sat in a corner of his cabin stared back at Spock, its grin seemingly mocking, triumphant. It was as if the inanimate object was amused at the very idea of a flesh and blood half-breed thinking it could somehow ignore and defy its biological nature.

Spock knew that one of his worse nightmares had finally begun to come true. He was reverting. His hybrid biology was going berserk. Whatever controls and conditionings given to him by Modern Vulcan's disciplines were deteriorating faster than he ever imagined possible. Soon, the ancient madness of his kind would be loose and raging out of control on a ship full of Humans. Those who considered themselves his friends would try to help him and probably be killed in the attempt. Killed or... worse.

A new thought suddenly took hold in the deep recesses of his mind and began to push itself to the forefront.

Jim... No. No. The Vulcan moaned inwardly. Not you. Of all people please not you. I can not. I will not.

But he knew that there was no way to stop it. No way to control the uncontrollable. No way except... one.

In sickbay, an unconscious Kirk moaned, caught in a nightmare of illusion and distortion...

He lay in sickbay, injured and alone.

A tall, familiar figure entered the room and came to stand over his bed.

He looked up and smiled a welcome. It was Spock.

To his surprise, the Vulcan smiled back, but there was something feral, animalistic about the expression on Spock's face. Something was not quite right.

"Spock...?" Kirk began, but even as he said it, he knew it was not true. "No. You're not Spock. Who are you?" He started to sit up.

In answer, the Spock-impostor emitted a sinister chuckle and forced him back onto the bed.

Alarmed, Kirk began to struggle but was no match for the Vulcanoid strength.

"Who are you? What do you want? Get your hands off of me!" He fought harder to free himself, to no avail.

"I am the Future," the Spock-impostor said, silver eyes glowing menacingly. "I am what will be if you don't take precautions." Powerful hands slipped about Kirk's neck and began to tighten, cutting off the air to his lungs.

"No..." Kirk gasped. "No. Spock..." A part of him reached out mentally: SPOCK! HELP ME!

"Fool. You call to your death," the Spock-impostor warned.

Abruptly, the nightmare ended.

Kirk opened his eyes to find McCoy, Chapel, and Larzen hovering over him, their faces set in lines of worry.

"Spock?" he murmured. "Where is Spock?"

"Is that the first thing you have to say upon awakening?" McCoy greeted irritably. "Not even a simple thank you, Doctor?"

"Bones!" Kirk interrupted, half in anger, half in fear. "Where is Spock?"

McCoy stopped, hurt and surprised. "I... don't know. I haven't seen him. Dee and Ms. Z/N brought you in from the gym. They did mention that you were working out with Spock, but they had no idea how you'd been injured. At least Dee here, didn't. Our Ms. Z/N disappeared before I could get anything out of her. Jim, I've said it once, I'll say it again. That girl bothers me. She..."

"Ensign Z/N had nothing to do with my injuries." Kirk was attempting to sit up.

McCoy was equally determined to make him stay put. "Jim, you are not to move from this bed. I just finished mending two cracked ribs." Kirk's words suddenly penetrated. "Wait a minute. What do you mean, she had nothing to do with your injuries? You've been subjected to somebody's brute strength. If it wasn't the Ensign, the only other person left is..."

The doctor stopped, his gaze locking with Kirk's. "Jim, you don't mean... Spock did this to you?" McCoy was incredulous.

"I think it's pon farr," Kirk said shortly, again attempting to rise. "I've got to find him."

"You? No way. I'm calling Security..." He turned, reaching for the intercom, but was stopped by the sight of Larzen and

Chapel's hasty departure. "Now, what's got into those two?" Then: "Oh, no. They couldn't be that stupid. Of all the foolish..." He reached again for the intercom.

"No," Kirk ordered and made it out of the bed before McCoy could prevent him. "No security. Larzen is enough."

"Larzen is a woman," McCoy reminded. "If she goes anywhere near Spock in his condition..."

"That's why I have to find him, Bones. You and I. Together we can help him. Like before." Fighting against a wave of pain, Kirk staggered toward the door.

Grumbling and protesting all the way, McCoy grabbed his medi-kit and hurried over to support him.

"Jim, you're not thinking clearly. We need Security. About five to ten very strong men. Spock will be out of his head. Crazy. You know the two of us can't handle him alone. Not with that Vulcan strength of his."

"Yes we can," Kirk insisted. "We can because there is no other choice."

"Nooooo..." Spock's cry of dismay reverberated about the cabin. He sat on the floor, his arms wrapped about his head, desperately trying to find the right mental key to do what had to be done.

But there was something interfering with his efforts to think clearly. Almost it seemed as if a voice was in his mind whispering and urging all sorts of unthinkable acts.

"No. No. I will not. I will not hurt... Not my friend. Not again. Not any of my friends. I will not. I would rather..." Suddenly Spock found the key he had been searching for. Yes. Yes. This was the only way. The only alternative left to him if he was to protect those he valued from himself.

Positioning himself in a kneeling position with his fingers steepled before him, the First Officer of the USS ENTERPRISE began a slow but deliberate chant, marshalling his mind, body, and will to shut down, totally, utterly, and with finality.

Zsazara approached the door to Spock's cabin, her Zamarian's senses fully alert and searching.

Ah, she had been correct. The subliminal, harmonious feel of the ship was disrupted. There was, of course, the Captain's physical pain and Sean's emotional distress. But now she sensed the Vulcan's biological turmoil and confusion. That, and...

And something else? Something or someone...

Opening her mind fully, she started to search without restrictions. But before she could focus on anything clearly, a more urgent matter drew her attention.

Shame. Overwhelming shame, mixed with self-disgust, fear, and a deep burning wish to die.

"Commander! No! Stop!" the Cygnetian cried. Her great strength all but ripped the locked door out of its frame in her haste to enter.

CHAPTER THREE

The Head Nurse and the Security Chief hurried into the turbolift.

"Dee, I don't want you to try and enter Mr. Spock's quarters. I want to go in alone. I know what to do. I've studied up on this condition."

"I just bet you have." Larzen found it hard to suppress a grin in spite of the seriousness of the situation. It was common knowledge to all in the crew that Nurse Christine Chapel had had a romantic crush on Mr. Spock for years. "But I'm not totally ignorant on the matter, either. Chris, I don't think you can do this. If anybody can... help him and survive, I think it would be me."

"You?!" Christine looked at her with the merest hint of hostility. "Just because you've had training in the art of self-defence? Well, Spock doesn't need some blonde Amazon to fight him. He needs..." She faltered, unable to voice the rest of her thoughts. Thoughts which said that Spock needed a woman who cared deeply for him. A woman who was willing to do whatever she had to, to help him survive. Even if it meant... Her reflections abruptly stopped, her romanticism not quite able to visualize her beloved Spock as a raving maniac who just might brutalize and kill her.

"Chris, no matter what you think or how much you care about this man, there is nothing romantic about what you are contemplating. It is a horrible, terrible experience."

"I'm not romanticizing, Dee. I'm being practical. I've met Spock's parents. The Lady Amanda is as Human as you and I." (A fact which Chapel felt more than justified her hopeful fantasies. If Amanda Grayson could endure it, then so could Christine Chapel. If Amanda Grayson could still love Sarek after all these years, then Christine Chapel would still love Spock when... the ordeal was over.)

Having followed the Head Nurse's unspoken train of thought, the Security Chief had no response to offer. Larzen shook her head in resigned acceptance. She would let Christine try it her way alone first, but be nearby in case more severe methods were needed.

The Vulcan, a huddled mass of misery, became aware of a presence in the room with him. A strangled cry of dread tore from his throat as he rose and rushed toward the bathroom.

"Jim! No! Get out of here. Get away from me," he warned without looking at the intruder.

"Commander. It is not the Captain. I am Ensign Z/N."

Spock paused in the bathroom doorway. Slowly he turned, relief

momentarily filling his soul upon discovering that it was the Cygnesian - and that she was alone.

"The Captain is in sickbay, sir," Z/N informed him, and realized her mistake even as she said it.

The relief fled as two impulses stirred inside Spock's divided soul. One was the desire to go to his Captain and friend, to offer comfort and an apology. The other was the desire to be anywhere but near someone he cared about in his condition.

"The Captain is all right, sir," Z/N sought to reassure him. "Dr. McCoy is with him."

"Thank you, Ms. Z/N," Spock managed. "Now, I must ask you to leave here at once." It was an order.

"You need not fear me, Mr. Spock." Zsazara discerned the reason behind the command. "I am a Zamarian warrior and a Z/N. You couldn't hurt me if you tried."

"You are a female!" His voice came out gratingly. "And I... I am an unbonded male in..."

"I know, sir. I understand," she told him. "I am here to help."

Spock looked at her in astonishment. "What...?!" He knew enough about her mysterious past to know that she had no trust or desire towards a man.

"Do you have someone you wish me to summon? Someone on Vulcan?"

Spock's dark head shook fiercely. "No. No. There is no one." Memories of T'Pring - and her rejection - surfaced. "No one anywhere."

"Christine..."

"No!" he refused immediately. "Not her. Not any Human female." His lean body slumped against the door-frame. "Not even... any Vulcan female," he whispered in defeat.

"I understand. If there is no one for you at this time that you desire, the only other option is to neutralize..."

But the First Officer felt that he was way past the point of self-control and was not listening. "This is a direct order, Ensign Z/N. Leave here now. Lock the door behind you. Call Security to stand guard. Let no one enter until it is over. Until there is... silence." Yet, even as he spoke, Spock was becoming aware of a change within him, an easing of the tension. As if the answer to his dilemma was near, if only he would permit it. "And, Ensign. Under no circumstances are you to allow the Captain near me. I am a danger to him... especially to him. Keep him away. Promise me, Ms Z/N. Swear to me..." Abruptly, the Vulcan stopped as his eyes fixed on the twisted remains of the door to his quarters. "No. No. What have you done?"

Horrified, he turned and disappeared into the bathroom, activating the door lock behind him.

.

Well, without knowing it, she had neutralized Sean's hormonal inclinations. It shouldn't be too difficult to do the same for Mr. Spock. In fact, she had began to do so when his unexpected reaction to the ruined door shattered the field of calm she had been constructing within him.

Zsazara followed him, stopping at the door closed in her face. "Commander. Please. Let me..." she began, only to drop all thoughts of patient persuasion when she sensed what he was doing. Without hesitation, she tore through the bathroom door as easily and quickly as she had the cabin's.

She found him huddled on the floor again, verbally intoning the death litany. His mind was already beginning to shut down vital body functions. There was no time to prepare or explain.

Quickly, Zsazara knelt in front of him, reaching out with her hands and mind, touching, merging...

Tides of yearning washed over him/her.

A terrible aching hunger and need blotted out all else.

A tremor wracked the body, awakening primal drives of the mind and body, stirring built-in passions forbidden.

It was the Time of Mating/the Time of Hunting.

It was...

CONFUSION. Thoughts not his/hers kept intruding.

/What...?/

/Together. We are together. One. We are one. One in passion. One in need.../

/No.../

/Yes. No. Needs... Passions different... But one... one in... VIOLENCE./

For him it was---Pon Farr. The Time of Mating.

The ceremonial bells rang out their ancient call in the hot, dry landscape of Vulcan. Their tingling sound was intoxicating. Yet...

With all his mind and soul Spock fought against their demanding summons to plea with T'Pau for Kirk's life.

"... I will do what I must, but not with him. Not with him. He is my friend. He does not understand. Forbid. I beg of you, forbid..."

Through the haze of his growing madness, Spock saw T'Pau's startled expression at his ability to speak and focus on something else other than the ceremony and heard her searching query:

"Are thee Vulcan? Or are thee Human?"

And for the first time in his life, Spock found that he did not really care which he was. All that mattered was that Jim Kirk was his Captain and his friend. He was determined to safeguard the Human even if it meant his death.

But the biological conditioning of centuries was too strong. Against his will, Spock found himself facing Kirk with deadly ancient weapons poised to kill...

For her it was---Mahonar. It was the Time of the Hunt.

Zsa joined her warrior sisters on the Gathering Field where their warmares waited impatiently. As the full moon rose to its majestic height, the young warriors leapt to the back of their mounts and sped forth to meet the Founding Mothers of their society, the five thousand LIFE-FORCES whose will to be and to fight had carried them through centuries of war, conquest, defeat, subjugation, flight, and final rebirth on worlds colonized under their Amazonian guidance and control.

"Welcome, Grand-daughters and great-grand-daughters," she who was the Oldest spoke. Zamara was her name. "We are the SURVIVORS. Come, young warriors-to-be. Come and hear our words."

Zsa and the others formed a half circle in front of the ELDERS.

"We are the survivors," Zamara's ancient voice repeated.

"THOU ART THE SURVIVORS," the young warriors echoed.

"You are our future, our legacy."

"WE ARE THE FUTURE, YOUR LEGACY."

"You exist for but one purpose."

"WE EXIST BUT FOR ONE PURPOSE."

"To defend our sisterhood and make war on its ancient enemy: man."

"WE WILL DEFEND OUR SISTERHOOD AND MAKE WAR ON OUR ANCIENT ENEMY: 'MAN'."

"Be still, young ones and listen to my story. Know that I and my four hundred and ninety-nine thousand peers were born long, long ago in the Time before Time. Once we were happy and stood with Men as equals, as helpmates. Then the Evil One came among them and set their minds and hearts upon vile imaginings. So offensive did they become that we separated ourselves from them. But our withdrawal angered Men, for one of their most vile creations was the belief that they were masters and that we were slaves, property to use and do with whatever they pleased, whenever they pleased."

"MEN: CREATURES OF VILE IMAGININGS," the young minds noted and filed away in their hearts for all times.

"For many centuries, we patiently endured their anger and arrogance. Some of us even submitted to their slavery and brutality. We called it 'love'. But in time, many of us came to know the folly of such self-deception. Also, in time, we, the five

hundred thousand, realized that if we were to survive we would have to fight."

"TO SURVIVE, WE MUST FIGHT."

"And fight we did. Down through the corridors of Time. And on many, many Battlefields and in many forms. But always it seemed, victory went to them. It soon became clear that we could not defeat them on their own worlds. Our numbers were too few and they wisely sought to keep them so."

"OUR DEFEATS HAVE BEEN MANY, OUR NUMBERS FEW."

"Now we are many and our worlds are powerful and secure. Through generations of genetic and biological breeding we now have bodies and minds that have no equal."

"NOW WE ARE MANY AND WE HAVE NO EQUALS."

"And the time has come at long last that Men will finally learn of the evil seeds that they planted in our souls."

"MEN: PLANTER OF EVIL SEEDS."

"Evil seeds that took root and grew to become as evil, if not more so, than they."

"WHATSOEVER A MAN DOETH UNTO US, WE WILL DO UNTO HIM ONE HUNDRED-FOLD."

Spock faced T'Pring's champion in the arena of challenge and knew that if he was to survive and find relief and regain his sanity, he would have to kill...

Though some small part of him protested and raged in silent helplessness, Spock knew that the inbred biological conditioning of generations was in full command of his mind and body, negating everything and everyone from his conscious awareness except his need to possess the woman...

T'Pring's challenge rang in his ears: "Kah-if-FARR!!" causing his breath to quicken, his eyes to narrow to slits.

How dare she. HOW DARE SHE DENY HIM WHEN HE WAS IN NEED.

Quickly now. He must destroy the rival, the obstacle that stood between him and the woman. For only the woman could relieve the pain, the burning agony that radiated up and down every nerve in his body.

The lirpa. It was in his hands. From childhood he had been taught to use it as if it was an extension of his mind, will, and body.

A figure stood before him, golden and blinding.

His tormented senses identified the figure as the target which he must destroy in order to claim T'Pring. With the speed of thought he struck with the lirpa and a streak of red appeared in the gold.

RED. Somehow, he had expected it to be green. But no matter. His heightened awareness assured him that he was accomplishing the purpose for which he had been set.

He struck again, with little result. Again and again. Then, at long last the golden figure was down. Quickly, now. Strike and end this delay, this interference. Soon the woman would be his, bringing about the end of his agony...

Zsa and her warrior sisters sat astride their great black warmares. All were of one mind, one intent as they listened to Zamara speak.

"Hear now, young warriors, what MAN'S evil has given birth to in the souls of we, the ELDERS of the Sisterhood."

"WE ARE LISTENING, OH GREAT MOTHER."

"Men are the Enemy. But Beauty is our Strength. There is nothing that can stop us for Sex is our weapon. We will take them, for there is no Man that can resist us. And when they have given us pleasure and the seed that brings unto us the life of another warrior sister, we will hunt them and kill them."

"WE WILL HUNT MEN AND KILL THEM."

"We are the Amazons of old, but you are now the Zamarians of new."

"WE ARE ZAMARIANS IN HONOUR OF THEE, MOTHER-CREATOR OF OUR CULTURE, GREATEST WARRIOR OF US ALL."

"And my grandmother," Zsa could not help but add with pride. Some of her peers picked up the thought and glared at her enviously.

Zamara, however, was not above feeling a little pride of her own for it was an undisputed fact that no bloodline in the Sisterhood had yet to match the incredible powers and deadly abilities achieved by her offspring. This was especially true of her oldest daughter Zoela and Zoela's first-born, Gsazara.

"Ride forth, young warriors, to the Hunt. Males who have fulfilled their usefulness have been released into the woods. Call upon the skills that you have been taught by your wild predator/mentors: the eagle, the hawk, the falcon, the tiger, the lion, the shark and countless others. Hunt down our enemies, each one of them. And when you have found them, kill them in whatever manner that pleases you at your leisure."

"WE WILL, GREAT MOTHER. WE WILL"

Anticipation and excitement began to invigorate their minds and bodies. It spread from them to their mounts. The warmares snorted and stamped their forelegs, impatient to be away and running.

"Go, now, young warriors. Seek out our ancient enemy."

"WE GO."

And so saying, Zsa and her warrior sisters leaned forward onto

the necks of the warmares and gave them free rein...

At last Spock wrapped the ahn woon about his rival's throat. With the promise of relief from the unbearable pain as his reward, he pulled the strip of leather tighter and tighter.

Soon now it would be over. The woman would be his. And his existence would be stable again.

His rival's struggles to escape were useless. Already his telepathic mind was picking up the final death throes...

Vision darkening.

Blood roaring in the ears.

Falling... Unable to move, to breath.

'SPOCK'

Odd. His name reaching out to him from the mind of the dying one was unexpected, jarring. So much so that it shocked him out of the plak tow to focus... upon the ashen, lifeless face of his Captain and friend.

JIM!!

Jim was dead and he, Spock, had killed him.

No. NOOOOOOOO...

His scream of despair and grief echoed within the corridors of his mind only. For true to his Vulcan heritage now that sanity had returned, Spock automatically held back any outward emotional expression. Staring down into the face of his dead friend, the First Officer of the Enterprise had but one thought: DEATH. He deserved to die for what he had done.

Straightening, he turned to face the woman. Stonn, the one that she wanted, the one that should have faced him in the arena instead of Jim, stood just behind her.

For the first time in his life, the pride Spock had always felt for his Vulcan half over his Human half crumbled.

There was no difference. If T'Pring and Stonn were any indication, the Vulcan in him was just as predisposed towards giving in to its baser inclinations as was his Human half.

A quote from a book in his Human mother's collection whispered out of ancient history to encircle his heart: '...THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE...' (Romans 3:10)

Abruptly, there was a shift in Spock's environment.

The drifting sands, the hot desert breeze and the red sky of Vulcan dissolved. In its place appeared a landscape of towering trees, a maze of sharp thorn beds and a dark, dark blue/black sky.

For several minutes, Spock stood motionless, undecided. Then he began walking, his naturally observant mind taking in the surroundings. There came to his senses the smell of green woods, the feel of rough tree bark, as he moved with care through the dense foliage.

Thorns caught at his tunic and trousers.

The night sky turned charcoal black above him, speckled with glittering diamonds of silver-white starlight. A certain Human would have thought it breath-taking. But that Human was no more and Spock's soul became heavier at the memory of that fact.

Spock stopped suddenly, tilting his head to one side, listening. He was sure that he had heard something strange in the distance, like the echo of a noise, but he could not discern from which direction the sound had come. Almost, it seemed like the high, shrill cry of a le-matya, the deadly predator cat of Vulcan.

But this type of environment was not the great feline's natural habitat.

Again Spock listened, sensitive ears straining, but the sound did not repeat itself. Cautiously, he began to walk once more, aware of the unease crawling down his spine.

Minutes later, without warning, the sound came anew. It was closer this time, over to his right. Some instinct made him turn left, pushing deeper into the thicket. A thorn cut into his hand, drawing blood.

The sound, now clearly one of an animal's cry of hungry anticipation, filled the night, freezing him in his tracks.

An animal? Or was it something else? And where was it coming from? What did it want?

At that moment, the full moon's light found him, shining down upon him as if to spotlight his location.

The cry came yet again, this time seeming to move over his head, fading to an end in front of him.

Spock's flesh began to crawl with a terror unnamed. Survival instincts took over. He must find a clearing, a place where he would have room to manoeuvre. Turning, he struggled back the way he had come, wondering what had possessed him to come this way in the first place.

The moonlight's ray shone down upon him, touching the back of his neck like soft, hot fingers. Spock broke through an especially thick growth of vegetation, paused to look about in order to get his bearings. Another clump of high foliage stood before and about him, dark, shapeless.

Spock took a step forward---and realized too late his mistake.

The clumps were not foliage, but--

As realization dawned, a part of the pseudo-foliage roared a challenge, at a pitch that all but shattered his eardrums. He staggered backward, heart pounding. The thing leaped forward, rising up and up on muscle-corded rear legs, its front legs pawing



the sky. Moon light glinted off steel piston-like hooves. Red, distended eyes glowed from either side of a massive, triangular head.

Numbly, Spock recognized the creature to be an equine of giant proportions. A huge, solid black horse of great physical power, screaming its blood-chilling excitement.

And on its back, was...

A humanoid figure, one hand clutching the animal's long flowing mane. Eyes in a shadowy face gazed down upon him, their stare fixed - eyes that glowed a burning electric blue.

Spock whirled, instinct urging him to flee.

Another dark shape blocked his exit.

He turned to go yet a third way, only to find that way barred also. Each time he turned, a dark figure on a great four-legged beast was there, with eyes like blue furnaces, raging flames which now focused all their energy upon him, radiating an unmistakable hideous, white-hot hatred.

Flowing robes, coloured silver by the moonlight, billowed about the figures. In fact, both the eyes and the silver had the touch of familiarity. So much so that for a moment, his mind reached for a most improbable surmise.

But that moment was of short duration for one glance about him conveyed to him clearly that he stood in a circle of ... DEATH.

Finding his voice, Spock spoke to them. "Who are you?"

They said nothing, sitting silently astride their mounts whose snorts rumbled like the thunder of storms worlds away. The eyes of riders and beasts were unblinking, scorching his soul.

Perhaps if he identified himself. He opened his mouth to speak. Some sixth-sense warned him to dodge as one of the figures behind him swung a great axe, its goal to separate his hand from his left arm.

But even as he avoided that slashing weapon, another figure raised its axe, moonlight reflecting off its killing edge. The blade fell with a hissing, metallic sound, its flight path aimed for his right arm.

Spock saw no way of avoiding it. Nor any way to avoid the blades being lifted and directed at him by the others in the circle.

It was sure death. He was going to be dismembered, hacked to pieces like a hunk of meat...

The axes began their descent, glittering in the moonlight.

Spock braced himself for what was to come, gazing up fearlessly into the eyes of hatred, accepting his fate. He had killed Jim Kirk, his Captain and friend in the Arena of Challenge back on Vulcan. It was only fitting that he now die at the hands of strangers on an unknown world.

As the axes swung closer and closer, one set of those burning

electric blue eyes caught and held his gaze. Odd, there almost seemed to be a glint of recognition in those eyes. A touch of familiarity...

"Commander Spock." A female voice reached out of nowhere to touch him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Recognition of the hunting party's prey served to shock the Cygnetian out of the mental bloodlust bred into her species.

Zsazara blinked, opening her eyes to focus upon the man whose head and shoulders rested in her lap.

It was Commander Spock, unconscious but alive.

With trembling hands and extreme care, she examined him for injuries. There were none, and she emitted a deep sigh of relief. Next, she checked the liah crystals. A glowing blue/white light churned in their fathomless depths. The violence of her regression had been contained, harming no one.

After a moment, Zsazara concentrated on the business of getting the Vulcan off the floor, into the next room, and onto his bed. Once she had him settled, she partially undressed him and set about cleaning him up. There was no embarrassment or self-consciousness as she worked. Care of two brothers, forty-four male cousins, and one hundred and six male relatives of warrior-sisters from infancy to adolescence had removed such inclinations long ago.

When her task was finished, the Cygnetian straightened and turned to leave. Meditation was urgently needed. The flashback episode into her early childhood had been most unsettling - and far too pleasant an indulgence. Mr. Spock was resting peacefully, his biological upheaval stabilized now. The liahs had absorbed the violent desperation of the pon farr also.

Approaching the door to the Commander's cabin, Zsa noted the damage she had done. She was debating whether to call maintenance or to do the repairs herself when Christine and D'Lorraine arrived.

The two blonde women stopped in their tracks, staring at her and the damaged door.

"My God!" the Head Nurse exclaimed.

"What happened here?" Larzen was all business, her first concern for the well-being of the command crew of the ship. "Where is Mr. Spock?"

"The Commander is asleep," Zsazara reported simply.

Chapel suddenly seemed to choke.

"Chris?" Zsa stepped forward to touch her friend. "Are you all right? You look pale."

"If you don't mind, Ms. Z/N, I'll check for myself on Mr. Spock's... health." Larzen moved past the Ensign and Chapel into the cabin.

Christine fought the impulse to pull away from Zsazara's touch of concern. She also fought not to jump to any kind of conclusions.

But she had heard the Captain say the First Officer was in pon farr.

And she had made it a point to learn the meaning and nature of 'pon farr' shortly after Spock had been stricken with it four years ago. It had not been an easy task, for there was little written or spoken of concerning the condition. Finally, she had taken the opportunity to speak with Spock's mother, the Lady Amanda, about the subject.

Albeit reluctantly, Amanda had explained that pon farr was a cycle in the Vulcan male's biological make-up that caused him to become interested in choosing a mate, a wife, to the exclusion of all else. Most importantly of all (as far as Christine was concerned) was the possibility that at some point in this condition the male might cease to be picky about who he wanted as his bed-partner.

It was perhaps the only chance she would ever have of proving to Spock that she could be everything he needed.

Or, at least... It *had* been her only chance.

Christine could not bring herself to either look at or speak to the Cygnetian.

Larzen returned from inside the cabin to stand in the doorway, a frown on her face. "What happened to these doors?" she wanted to know after a moment.

"The Commander was... upset?" Zsazara began.

"Mr. Spock did this to the doors?"

"No. I... "

"Spock did what to what?" The three women turned to see Kirk and McCoy hurrying toward them. The speaker was the Doctor.

"Ladies," the Captain said in a breathless whisper of relief, glad to find all of them unharmed. "Is everyone all right?"

"Yes, sir," Zsazara answered, adding, "including Mr. Spock, sir."

"You've... been with Spock?" McCoy demanded.

Automatically, the two men examined her more closely, visually looking for any physical injuries.

"Yes, sir. The Commander was most upset. I did not think it wise for him to be alone in such a state, so I... "

"My God! What happened to the door?" Kirk suddenly noticed the condition of the bulkhead surrounding the entrance to Spock's cabin. Not waiting for an answer, he pushed past the women and went inside, followed by McCoy.

With an effort of will, Christine managed to free herself of Zsazara's support without conveying resentment.

Her worse fears had just been confirmed.

Another woman had beaten her to Spock.

Slowly, she turned away...

"Chris, you mustn't worry. I assure you, the Commander is all right, now." The Cygnetian walked a little way with her down the corridor. "There is no need to fear for his life."

"Huh? Oh... er... Yes," the Head Nurse murmured. "Thank you." Her efforts to keep the bitterness out of her voice failed miserably. "Thank you very much."

CHAPTER FIVE

Captain and Doctor stood over the Vulcan's bed, watching their friend, who slept peacefully, seeming none the worse for having just gone through a most violent biological upheaval.

McCoy carefully held out the scanner, running it over the long lanky frame. "Total exhaustion," he diagnosed after a moment. "Otherwise, he's in perfect health."

"No sign of...?"

"None whatsoever."

Kirk drew a shuddering breath of relief and leaned against the room divider.

"Jim, that stimulant and pain-killer is not going to last much longer." McCoy took his arm. "Let me get you back to sickbay."

"No." Kirk shook his head. "I'm staying here with Spock. I've got to. It's important."

"Jim, you're in no condition... "

"Order a cot for me. Or bring Spock to sickbay. Either way, I must be with him when he wakes up."

"All right," McCoy grumbled, recognizing the urgency in his friend's voice. He walked around the bed to the intercom.

Sitting down on the bed next to the Vulcan, Kirk let his eyes examine the familiar satanic features of his First Officer, the silky, blue/black hair, the elegant upswept eyebrows and pointed ears. This man, this half-Human alien, was his best friend. Perhaps the best friend he had ever known. In fact, there were times when he thought of Spock as a brother, sometimes more so than he did his real brother, George Samuel Kirk, who had been killed on Deneva years ago.

And yet, even that did not fully explain what seemed to be between them. Was it that unknown element, Spock's telepathy, and his own receptive sensitivity, that gave their friendship that extra uniqueness?

Through the worst of times...

Through the best of times...

In a rare moment of open affection, the Captain of the Enterprise reached out to rest a hand on the silken hair and warm forehead of his First Officer, in much the same way as he recalled the touch of his father, his mother, and even that of his own brother once or twice when he lay ill.

Spock's awareness slowly rose from the depths of deep sleep. Gradually, he became conscious of his identity, his body - and the surprising realization that all of his bodily systems were functioning properly and normally.

Relief washed through him - and confusion.

Then he became aware of a presence at his side. His eyes opened to look up into the tired but happy face of Jim Kirk.

"Captain... " he whispered.

"I'm here, Spock," the Human assured.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. And you?"

"As far as I am able to determine at present, sir, I am functioning properly," Spock answered, the amazement and puzzlement clearly in his voice.

"Ms Z/N," the Human supplied.

"Oh. Indeed," was all that the Vulcan could think to say.

For a moment the two friends sat silently, drawing contentment in the well-being of the other.

Then Spock spoke. "Jim, we must talk."

Minutes later, the Doctor had set up the medical monitoring systems to his liking, and along with Security and the rest of the medical staff, departed. A temporary door was set up at the entrance to the Vulcan's cabin, giving them much-needed privacy.

"Jim?"

"Yes, Spock." Kirk carefully settled himself upon the cot that McCoy had set up for him near the Vulcan's bed.

"Do you recall our conversations of the past six months concerning the direction of our careers at the end of this five year mission?"

A sudden uneasiness ran down Kirk's spine. This was not a subject he liked contemplating. "Yes. I remember."

Spock took a long time to continue, as if he, too, dreaded what was to come. "I regret... "

"Spock, no," Kirk interrupted. "Don't say it. Don't even think it. I... simply do not want to deal with it now."

"Jim... "

"I said *no*." And his tone was perilously close to a command.

"Earlier, in the gym... " Spock decided on a round-about approach. "During our workout... "

"I know. It was... that 'time' again, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Kirk took a deep breath, but could not think of any more delicate way to ask than, "We arrived to find Ms Z/N with you."

Spock grew still, trying to brace against the worst. "Is she all right?"

"Fine. As far as everyone can tell. Bones is probably examining her now, but she was up and about. We found her standing in your doorway talking to Nurse Chapel and Chief Larzen."

"Christine! Nurse Chapel was here?" Spock asked with obvious concern.

"Yes. She... came to help, except... Ms Z/N seems to have beaten her to it."

Spock closed his eyes and tried very hard not to think of how many strange, prying alien eyes had witnessed his insanity and humiliation. But he would have to deal with that later. There were other matters to concern him now. He would have to speak with the Cygnesian as soon as possible, find out what her customs were in this type of situation. And whatever they were he would adjust to them accordingly, he determined. It was the least that he could do, seeing as how he had probably given her no choice in their... union.

(Odd... Try as he might, Spock discovered that he simply could not recall what had gone on between them.)

And then, of course, there was Nurse Chapel. Christine. He knew of her feelings for him, and how she must be feeling right now. What could he say to her? What could he do?

"I'm being unrealistic." Kirk's words interrupted his thoughts. "OK, Spock. What was it you wanted to say earlier?"

Spock put aside his musing to focus on his Captain and friend. He even took a moment to let his eyes study every line and contour of Kirk's face, as if to store it in his memory forever.

"Jim, I must leave."

The Human stiffened as if struck, and looked away. "I.. suspected as much," he said finally.

"Jim, understand that this... episode was totally unexpected. There was no warning. I almost killed you during our gym workout. I can't risk that happening again. To you. Or anyone else. I am an unknown. Apparently, even to myself. I am a danger - to you,

the crew, and this ship. I have to go."

CHAPTER SIX

From sickbay, McCoy checked the two monitoring devices he had left in the Vulcan's cabin. From the readings, he could tell that they weren't exactly resting. Grumbling, he seriously contemplated storming up to the room and sedating them. Only...

Only, he was a friend to each and knew that whatever they were doing it was necessary to the well-being and sanity of both.

"Blasted Vulcan. Of all the people in the universe to become best friends with, James T. Kirk, why, oh why, did you have to pick a Vulcan?"

Turning away from the monitors, he returned to a nearby alcove to continue his examination of the Cygnetian. Though Nurse Chapel stood by to assist, it was Nurse Dahl who was doing the actual hands-on work.

"Ms Z/N..." For a moment, he faltered, not sure how to address her. Was she still a... er, single? Dare he try Mrs. Spock? The thought was too much. He dropped it. "Are these readings normal for you?" he asked incredulously.

Zsazara nodded and smiled as the Doctor checked and re-checked his instruments.

"Young lady, according to these readings, you are not aging. Yet, your metabolic rate is like a raging furnace. Is this some kind of false projection put out by those crystals of yours?"

"Partially, sir. The liahs act as a regulator of my physical self. Without them, my true readings would overload and burn out your instruments."

"And you really expect us to believe that you're a native of Cygnet XIV?" McCoy muttered, knowing that the women who colonised that planet were Earth standard in their biological make-up.

"I never said that I was a native, Dr. McCoy" Zsazara responded quietly, "only that I have citizenship from the culture on that planet."

"That's not exactly the way your ID and personnel files explain it."

Zsazara shrugged, but said nothing more. She, of course knew the Captain had already sent a top priority inquiry back to Starfleet Headquarters requesting more details on her background and origins. It would be interesting to see what kind of response came back.

McCoy shook his head in bafflement. What was he to do? What could he do? He dare not antagonize her, especially now that Spock's life and sanity lay in her power. Again, he studied the readings. "In fact, Ms. Z/N..."

"Zsa, sir," she corrected him, letting him know that he need not be so formal or be intimidated.

"Your body is hardly doing any of the things a normal, living body does to indicate that it exists."

"I am what I am, Doctor." The Cygnetian reached up and casually flipped several strands of her long dark hair back over her shoulder.

Normally, Zsa wore her hair (which was jet black in colour with silver strands scattered throughout it in such a manner as to give one the impression of a crown) in an upswept tightly braided circular wrap about her head. As far as McCoy and the others could tell, it was the only thing out of place in her physical appearance.

"And that's the million credit question, isn't it?" Larzen commented from where she stood near the door. "What are you, exactly?" She, also, was none too pleased at the thought of an unknown aboard ship having a personal involvement with the First Officer.

"Well, I'm not Human, although there is some fraction of that species in my ancestry. What I am, none of you have ever really encountered before, and I simply do not have the words to explain it to you. And if that wasn't bad enough, I'm also under orders not to expound on my background to any degree."

"Whose orders?" Larzen demanded.

Zsa looked surprised at the question. "Starfleet Command, of course."

"Specify. Who in Starfleet Command do you report to?" The Security Chief's hand was edging toward her phaser.

"That I certainly can't tell you, Dee."

"Ensign..." Larzen began in a threatening voice, not responding to the informal address between friends.

"However, if it serves to reassure you, you might check with your father," Zsazara suggested.

That stopped Larzen for a moment. "My father? What has my father to do with this and you?"

"It would be better if you discussed that with him."

McCoy and Larzen both found themselves cursing in unison. As always, when they questioned the Cygnetian, she left them more confused and frustrated than when they began.

Zsazara, on her part, was not so much concerned about the Doctor and the Security Chief's emotional upsets as she was about Christine Chapel's. From the moment the Head Nurse had found her standing in the First Officer's doorway, Chris had refused to look her in the eye.

It was not long before the Cygnetian reached the conclusion that Chapel was (and perhaps the others as well) under the impression that she and the Commander had been intimate with each other in the physical sense.

At first, her Zamarian sensibilities were offended that they would think her so petty and self-gratifying as to take advantage of a male in that manner. But then she recalled that in their culture such behaviour was perfectly acceptable, even expected.

"Dr. McCoy, I am of a race known as the Zamarians. It is not an identification listed in any of your records, so researching it is useless. No one knows anything about us unless they are told by one of us... or someone who knows of us." Zsazara drew the attention of all of them. "We are a race, a culture, and a philosophy unto ourselves. I tell you this so that you will understand the things I am about to say to you." She paused to marshal her thoughts. "The mating customs of my people are a very personal and private... arrangement. To some, such matters are even considered sacred. We share them with no one, except the one involved. Nor do we indulge in such matters casually or with strangers. I perceive that all of you are curious as to exactly what went on between me and the Commander. Some of you are positive that you already know." She glanced in Chapel's direction.

"Well, of course we know," McCoy answered for everyone. "We know Spock and what was wrong with him and that there is only one way to... cure it."

This time, Zsazara did laugh. "Mortals, and Humans in particular, have this incredible knack for thinking they understand that which they have only begun to experience and comprehend." Abruptly, she stopped and looked apologetic. "Just as immortals have a knack for getting a little too arrogant about what they know, or think they know, sometimes. It was that trap that M'chel fell into."

The mention of Gary Mitchell served to recall to the listening Humans that they not only owed this strange female a debt of gratitude for the life of their First Officer but for the life of their Captain as well.

In the Vulcan's quarters, M'chel's invisible silver form stood in the middle of the room, watching and listening to the exchange between Kirk and Spock. It was safe enough to be here, since Zsazara was otherwise occupied trying to calm the fears of McCoy, Chapel and Larzen.

The Human was on his feet; pacing back and forth, while the Vulcan sat cross-legged, Indian style, on the bed, steepled fingers held out before him. Spock's announcement of his impending departure was enough to override any medication that McCoy had given Kirk.

"Jim..."

"I really should have been expecting this," Kirk commented. He attempted a chuckle, only it stuck in his throat. "Who am I kidding? I was expecting it. I... just hoped... somehow, some way..."

"Jim, it grieves me to disappoint you."

"Why? Disappointment. Isn't that what life's all about?"

"Jim... "

"Please, old friend. Give me a few minutes. In a moment I'll be able to deal with this and accept it just the way a Starship Captain is supposed to do. Calmly. Sadly, but resigned. Detached."

The Captain of the Enterprise ceased his pacing and stood with his face to the alcove panel. His First Officer left the bed and went to him, not touching but standing close beside him.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" Kirk asked finally.

"I have an... " He faltered. "I regret that I can think of no other... option."

"What about the Ensign?"

"I have not spoken with her yet," Spock admitted, recalling that his plans did need to be discussed with one other.

Noting the direction of the conversation, M'chel frowned in anger and alarm. If the half-breed and Zsazara were allowed to talk, she would calm his fears, persuade him to stay. In fact, being a Z/N, she would probably discern his tampering with the First Officer's biology. Something had to be done, and quickly - with finality.

A crippling pain suddenly ripped through Kirk's chest, doubling him over.

"Jim!" Spock gripped the Human's shoulders. "What is it?"

"Pain..." Kirk gasped.

Supporting his Captain, Spock guided Kirk to the bed and gently settled the Human in the spot he had vacated.

Kirk regained his breath and vision as the pain receded. He looked up into the Vulcan's face, into the dark eyes. The feeling of deja vu returned as he recalled his nightmares in sickbay.

"Spock..."

The Vulcan's hand had been reaching for Kirk's face, intending a light mind-touch to relieve the pain, when a wave of sensory distortion made him freeze.

Against his will, he felt his hands, always gentle and caring around this Human, tightened into fists set on murder.

/THIS IS YOUR RIVAL FOR THE WOMAN YOU NEED TO SURVIVE. HE TOOK YOUR FIRST MATE FROM YOU. HE NOW PLOTS TO TAKE THE SECOND. KILL HIM./

The voice seemed to come from nowhere, overwhelming and demanding. Fearing that the madness was coming upon him again, Spock screamed and flung himself away from his Captain. Horror blotted out all else as the symptoms of pon farr swept over him again.

"NOOOOOOO!"

His metabolism was out of control! Not even the help of the Cygnetian, or any woman, could alleviate the insanity of his mixed

heritage. He should have never been born. Never been allowed to live. Never dared to enter Starfleet. And he should never have permitted himself to become friendly with a Human, with his Captain, with Jim Kirk.

Get away. Run. Yes. He had to get away. Leave the ship. Leave Kirk. Forever. It was the only way to protect both.

Even as this course of action crystallized in his mind, the Vulcan found himself in the corridors leading to the turbolift. Quickly, now, to the hanger bay. There he could take a shuttle and go...

WHERE?

Did it matter?

M'chel cursed.

No matter what he did, the blasted half-breed always exerted sufficient strength of will to avoid hurting Kirk!

A memory from his time among the Zamarians stirred to vex him...

At yet another failure on his part to control his new-found powers, Gsazara's voice whispered a gentle reprimand into his mind.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls'."

"You've been attending those damned religion classes again," he had accused, glaring up at her.

"Yes. I have." She stood before him, unquestionably the most beautiful vision of feminine loveliness that he had ever seen. "That seems to anger you. Why?"

"Why? Because it's such a waste, that's why. You and your kind, with all this power, all this beauty, and you keep it locked away. Under control. You should be Empress of the Universe with every male worshipping at your feet."

She had smiled. "Yes. I should."

"Then why don't you make it so?"

"Are you advocating that we, the Zamarians, go forth and conquer the worlds of men? Even that of your own homeworld, Earth?"

"Yes. Especially Earth."

"Why? So that you might rule over it, perhaps?"

Yes. Though he had made it a point not to speak aloud, she had discerned his answer.

"Oh, M'chel. Sometimes I despair that you will ever learn. Power like ours cannot be used for such personal ambitions. To do so brings about much destruction, not only of the conquered but of the conqueror. Power, like passion, sooner or later turns on its

creator if it is not disciplined.

She had been right. He had never learned, refused to learn.

But apparently this Vulcan half-breed knew the lesson.

Knew - and lived it.

That knowledge served to anger him even more as he realized that this was one of the reasons why Gsazara looked upon Spock with more favour and affection than she had ever shown him.

In the Vulcan's quarters, Kirk rolled off the bed, ignoring the pain every move brought, and went after his First Officer and friend.

"Spock. Wait. Listen to me!" he called weakly. "It's not you..."

The meaning of his nightmare in sickbay had crystallized into a clear realization: this entire situation was not the fault of Spock's Vulcan biology, but of an unknown alien interference.

Unknown? No! *It was Mitchell again.* Recalling the glowing silver eyes of the Spock-impostor, Kirk was sure of it.

"Mitchell! Leave him alone. It's me that you want!"

A silent voice in his mind urged him to call Security, to find Z/N. But he knew that Spock's humiliation would be unbearable if others were involved.

So thinking, the Captain of the Enterprise went after his First Officer alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

On the bridge of the Enterprise, Helmsman Sulu frowned at the readings on his board.

"Something wrong?" Navigator Pavel Chekov inquired.

"I'm getting the weirdest readings from the shuttlebay deck." Sulu activated the com-link. "Hey, Rico, what are you guys doing down there?"

"Sulu?" Rico's voice came over the line. "I wish I could tell you. But at the moment, I just don't know. A few minutes ago, Mr. Spock rushed in looking like the devil himself, and ordered everyone out of the bay. He was getting ready to take off when the Captain showed up, over-rode the lock and walked in, ordering the rest of us to remain outside."

Sulu and Chekov exchanged looks of amazement.

Communications Officer Lt. Uhura and others of the bridge crew, also stopped whatever they were doing to listen. Ship gossip had already whispered of the strange happenings between the Captain and the First Officer that started in the workout gym and somehow ended

up in Mr. Spock's quarters. Eye witnesses spoke of a damaged door and the presence of not only Nurse Chapel, but Chief Larzen and Ensign Z/N hanging about the Vulcan's door.

Now, the action (whatever it might be) seemed to have moved to the hangar bay.

"For a second there, we all thought the Captain was a dead man. Mr. Spock started to depressurise the bay, but he must have seen the Captain coming. He aborted the procedure just in time."

"What's happening now?" Sulu asked.

"I'm not sure, but I think the Captain is ordering Mr. Spock to let him in the shuttle. And... it looks like..."

"What?"

"Mr. Spock is refusing."

The idea of the Vulcan disobeying an order from the Captain was unheard of as far as the crew of the Enterprise was concerned. They had seen Spock risk reprimand and near dismissal from Starfleet Command itself to carry out an order given him by Kirk. For him to refuse now meant that this situation was really serious.

"Spock..." Kirk leaned against the shuttlecraft's door, his physical strength all but gone. *Let me in. Let me help you.*

Inside the shuttle, Spock sensed his Captain's unspoken words and felt the Human's exhaustion.

Jim. Please. Go away. Leave me so that I can do what I must, he projected mentally towards his friend.

The answer came. *No. It's not you. It's Mitchell. We have to fight him. Together. Let me in, Spock. I... need you.*

All his life, Spock had struggled with a divided soul. This situation was more of the same. Every nerve and instinct urged him to seek isolation so that he could suffer and die in privacy. Only, his Captain was calling him. And if Mitchell was near, Jim was in danger and did indeed require his assistance.

Could he maintain control long enough to protect Kirk against so powerful an entity?

Z/N. Where was she?

He had a sudden mental vision of Mitchell's silver-charged form closing in on Kirk as the Human leaned against the shuttle. Alarmed, he disengaged the lock.

Still in sickbay, Zsazara was beginning to regret the concessions she had made in sharing those pieces of information on her Zamarian background. The questions just kept coming. She fielded most of them the best she could, but every once in a while one of them really got to her.

"I still cannot tell anything from these readings, Ensign." McCoy was saying. "I've noted that you refuse to use the contraceptive injections. So there's no polite way to ask this: Do you think you might be pregnant?"

"What?" Zsa exclaimed in astonishment. Didn't these Humans ever listen? This was the last straw. "Dr. McCoy, this conversation is at an end. If you have any further questions, you will address them to Mr. Spock."

McCoy started to protest, only to stop himself. Idiot. She was right. He should not be discussing this, especially with others not personally involved in the room. For all his well-known verbal battles with the Vulcan, the Doctor was just as sensitive to and protective of Spock's privacy and dignity as was Kirk.

Now that the conversation and their thoughts had shifted to Kirk and Spock, McCoy realized that he hadn't checked on the two in a while. He was turning to do so when a call came over the intercom for Larzen.

"Yes, Cougar. What is it?"

"Chief, there's some unexplained activity going on in the hangar bay. The Captain and Mr. Spock are in a shuttle together and all our efforts to communicate with them have failed. Mr. Scott is trying an over-ride on the doors but none of the instruments will work, including our phasers."

"I'm on my way," Larzen said.

"And so am I," McCoy declared, about to burst a blood vessel. He had given those two strict orders to stay put. Why, oh, why did he ever let them convince him that they could ever be trusted to do what they were told?

Without hesitation, Zsazara slipped off the diagnostic bed to follow. Larzen and McCoy both glared at her, but managed to restrain themselves from commenting when they saw the look of determination in her eyes.

"Doctor... "

Everyone paused. It was Chapel.

"Chris. Please. Stay here. If there's an emergency, I'll need you here to set up and organize the staff," McCoy told her.

"Yes, sir." The Head Nurse's manner was resigned, as it always seemed to be in situations like this.

The Cygnesian held back as the others left.

"Chris, this is a breach of my privacy and the Commander's. But I sense that you need to know. There is nothing between me and him by which you should feel... threatened."

For the first time, Christine locked gazes with her.

"Thank you, Ensign." The lovely blonde woman's tone was sincere. However it was only for a moment, as she added, "But I don't know what you are talking about. Don't you have a job to do elsewhere?"

Zsa stood looking at her, momentarily confused until she realized that this was Chapel's way of conveying her gratitude on a topic she did not want to acknowledge or discuss.

"Yes, I do. Thank you, Nurse. I'm on my way. And I will keep him safe for you."

Chapel watched the Cygnetian go. Alien or no, the girl was acting the friend.

"And you know that," Chapel told herself. "Deep down inside, you know that. So, why is it that you feel so threatened every time you think of her and Spock in the same quadrant?"

Turning, she found Nurse Dahl standing by waiting for instructions. Praying that she had not spoken loud enough to be overheard, Chapel set about giving orders that would have the sickbay and its staff ready for any upcoming emergency.

Zsazara hurried after the Humans, but was not fast enough to catch the same turbolift as them. She ended up in the next one, alone.

She ordered it to the hangar bay deck, and it began to obey only to stop unexpectedly.

"What..." The Cygnetian grabbed the manual control to maintain her balance.

The doors slid aside to allow Sean DePaul to enter.

"Sean!"

"Zsa..." The young Human looked about him, confusion in his eyes and manner. "Where... where am I?"

"Sean, what are you doing here?"

"I don't know." He backed up against the far wall, staring at her warily.

"What is going on?" Zsa demanded, as confused as Sean.

A familiar laugh filled the confined space of the turbolift, startling both of them.

"M'chel!!!"

"Greetings, Zsazara. You know, *little sister*, I don't think I like that term of endearment any more. Especially since you and I aren't exactly friendly any more."

"As you wish, Gary Mitchell. What are you doing here?"

"What do you think? I'm visiting old friends and places from my former life."

"If you would allow us to help you, Gary, you could regain as much of that life as you wanted."

"Help me? I know all about the kind of help you females want



to give someone like me. You want to take my powers away. And don't try to deny it. The Sisterhood is terrified at the idea that there's a male in the galaxy who has powers to equal theirs."

Zsazara shook her head in disbelief. Obviously, M'chel's mental deterioration was getting worse if he really believed that the Sisterhood feared him. The truth of the matter was that this pursuit of him was strictly personal. It was a Z/N family affair only. The rest of the Sisterhood couldn't care less about what became of a male unfortunate enough to acquire their genetically designed and enhanced powers, for the simple reason that such abilities were exclusively for a female's biological make-up. The Founding Mothers had been adamant about incorporating that one very crucial trait every step of the way in their technological research. It was unthinkable for the Sisterhood to spend generations developing the ultimate warrior science to be used against men, only to have a man steal it and duplicate it to his advantage.

M'chel did not know it but since his escape from the protective influence of her sister's stabilizing psionic control his life expectancy on this plane of existence was fast approaching an end.

Then again, he did know it (for Zsazara had warned him) but as part of his rebellion against them he had chosen not to believe.

"Gary, we do not want to take your powers, only control your use of them."

"What's the difference?"

"You are being childish."

"Look who's talking. How old are you, Zsazara? Three hundred and thirty-five and still a virgin. Where I come from, they institutionalized people with your hang-ups."

Zsa stiffened, sensing Sean's startled glance upon her.

"Gary, you were a member of my family for three of your mortal years. We opened our hearts and our private lives to you. Now you dishonour yourself by speaking publicly of such things."

In spite of his efforts not to, Mitchell felt a twinge of guilt and regret at his verbal outburst. Nevertheless, he went on,

"In case you haven't noticed, I've brought you a cute little playmate. I also paralysed the turbolift system. Why don't you take this opportunity to become a woman and have a little fun with Navigator DePaul. I'm sure he's more than willing."

To his surprise, Zsazara laughed and actually seemed to be considering his suggestion.

"What's the first stanza you heard in your Zamarian cultural classes, Gary?" she asked finally.

"What...?" But even as he questioned, he remembered: 'Yield not to temptation, for yielding is the first step to death.'

"Thank you, Gary, for I know that from your point of view this is a gift-offering. But you, perhaps more than any male, know why I cannot accept it."

Mitchell made no response to that. Instead, he seemed to be waiting for something.

Abruptly, Zsazara realized that she was being decoyed.

"M'chel! What have you done? The Captain and Mr. Spock..."

Mitchell's laughter echoed around them.

"M'chel... It was you. You triggered the Commander's mating cycle!"

"Yes. And by now, the half-breed has either killed my old friend, James T. Kirk, or... " the laugh became even more sinister "...worse."

They were alone.

Locked away from the crew and the rest of the ship.

Even as he had released the lock, Spock instantly regretted the action. Alarmed, he had tried to make Kirk leave but the Human had adamantly refused.

"Spock. Listen to me. *It's not you.*"

But Spock had retreated from him, fleeing to the rear of the shuttle and locking the door to the small cargo room behind him.

"Spock..."

"Jim... Please... Go away. Leave this place. I am... not myself. I..."

Kirk cursed. "You blasted Vulcan. Listen to me. And that's an order. I don't think it's you. It's not your biology that's going crazy. It's Gary. Spock, do you hear me?"

"What?" The Vulcan tried to focus on his words, but it was difficult. "I do not understand."

"I had another one of those dreams. A nightmare. I was in sickbay and you came to me. When I greeted you, you tried to kill me. Only the eyes weren't yours. They were silver and menacing. They were Gary Mitchell's."

Spock's agitation ceased somewhat as he did a thorough self analysis.

"I... cannot tell."

"Think, Spock. What is it that Gary would be trying to accomplish if he is behind this?"

"To... take your place."

"Or maybe yours, my friend. Either way, the easiest way for him to do it is to separate us, to create distrust between us. We can't let that happen, Spock. I won't let that happen. Open this door. Let me in."

"Captain... Jim... "

"That's an order, Mister." Then, in the tone of a friend.
"Trust me, Spock. Trust me as I trust you."

There was a long hesitation before the cargo door slid aside. Spock staggered out, looking haggard, debilitated.

So quickly! Kirk was shocked. Nevertheless, he moved to meet the Vulcan, to offer support.

Spock's dark eyes were aflame. It was the blood fever, plak tow. "No, Captain. No. You must not touch me." He swayed, started to turn, to go back to the cargo hold. "It is a mistake. I should not..."

"Spock, we have one of two options. Either I get the Ensign in here or... you meld with me."

Amidst the agony reflecting in his eyes, the Vulcan looked at him in stunned disbelief.

"No," he answered with a finality that shook Kirk to the core of his being. "You do not know what you are asking. I am not... normal. I am a... biological freak. I cannot even remember Ms Z/N's help. And if I meld with you... Jim, if I touch you in this condition, I would surely kill you."

"I will risk it."

"No."

"I'm giving you no choice, my friend." Kirk closed the distance between them.

"No."

"Join your mind to mine, Spock. Let me into your mind. Let me share this madness. It's emotional, isn't it? This time more than the last. That's because it's not a true one. I'm better experienced to deal with emotions than you..."

Spock shook his head violently. "You don't understand. There are other factors, other..."

"I'm not going to let you die."

"Better me, than you." The Vulcan sagged against the door frame, slipped to the floor and settled there on his knees.

"No, Spock. I won't accept that. We're a team, you and I. You are not going to kill me. We've come a long way since your first pon farr. You've spoken often of my great strength of will. We'll use that. That and your Vulcan mental skills." Kirk knelt before him, taking Spock's hands and gently placed the long fingers in position for the mind-meld on his own face.

"No." But this time, the Vulcan's refusal was weak, and in spite of his efforts not to, the meld began to develop. For not the first time, Spock found himself marvelling at the uncanny power of Jim's personality to draw him, like steel to a magnet.

We are one, my friend. One unto life... or death.

Zsazara prepared to teleport out of the turbolift. The power to do so was not one that she excelled at. In fact, doing so usually left her physically nauseous for weeks.

"Is that true?"

It was Sean. She'd forgotten all about him.

"Sean, I have to go to the Captain and Mr. Spock. They are in danger from M'... Mitchell and need my help."

"You've never been with a man." Sean seemed oblivious to all else. "Is that true?"

Zsa looked at him, uncomprehending. Of all the things to become fixed on. After a moment, she shook her head in resignation, accepting that she would never understand Humans and men in particular.

"Sean, I don't have time to discuss this with you now. Later, when the Captain and the Commander are safe, I will come to you and undo the damage I did to you. Then we will talk - about other things."

"Other things..." Sean straightened from the wall.

"Yes. I promise," Zsa said quickly, as the build up of psionic energy to teleportation took hold.

The next second she was gone.

The Cygnetian materialised inside the shuttle and felt lucky that she hadn't reformed inside a bulkhead. But then that was what the liahs were for, monitoring mental and/or physical energy and directing it properly. Within seconds the nausea began and it was all she could do not to throw up. Idly, she wondered why the Founding Mothers ever craved bodies of matter. They were such nuisances. One had to devote a great deal of attention to maintaining them.

As if in answer to her thought, her sister's words stirred in her memory.

"Oh, Zsa. You don't yet know the joy of it. To be. To touch. To feel - the wind, the rain, the sun, a man, a child. You just don't know the wonder of it yet. But one day, when it is right for you, you will know. Be patient and don't close your mind to it."

"Yes, sister," she had agreed that day as they stood on the balcony of their mother's household. "I'll... not close my mind to the possibility that one day I will be grateful to be going through this stage of existence." A day which now seemed so long ago and an agreement which had set her on a path that led to citizenship on Cygnet XIV, entrance into the United Federation of Planets' Starfleet, and finally to this starship.

With a headache and less than perfect concentration, Zsa set herself to locate and assist her superior officers.

CHAPTER SIX

GOLD.

Golden desert sand.

RED.

Red shimmering curtain of atmosphere, the sky.

These were the colours of his homeworld.

They were also the colours and textures of his most precious acquaintances, especially among humankind.

There was his mother, silver-gold of hair.

And perhaps...

The botanist on Omicron Ceti III.

The outcast in Sarpeidon's past, and...

Yes, even a nurse here aboard the ENTERPRISE.

All golden-haired, all red of blood.

Of each it could be said that he cared deeply for in his own (half-Vulcan, half-Human) way.

Yet, of all the souls that he had encountered throughout his life, of all the minds he had touched, none held him as secure as did Jim Kirk's.

Why? Often he had meditated on that very question, and had yet to come up with a completely satisfying explanation. He knew only that Jim was his Captain, his friend, his...

T'hy'la.

It was a very ancient Vulcan term meaning in this context soul-kin, soul-twin, soul-sibling.

For a while he rested, content with the warmth of belonging that such thoughts gave him.

But such reflections on things ancient and Vulcan led to the one custom that his mind had been trying to avoid: PON FARR.

Pon Farr and... his t'hy'la.

The Arena of Challenge and Jim.

No. No. No. It cannot be. It must not be. Never again. It was better to die.

BETTER TO DIE.

"Commander." A woman's voice intruded on his thoughts of death. "Mr. Spock, sir. There is no need for such drastic action. All is well."

Spock's eyes snapped open and he looked up into the calm dark eyes of Ensign Zsazara Z/N.

"Dr. McCoy and a medical team will be here in a few minutes."

For the longest time, he could only stare at her in bemused wonderment. Finally, his thoughts and reality took hold. He turned, searching for his Captain.

Kirk lay on the other side of the Cygnetian, who sat cross-legged Indian-style between the Vulcan and the Human.

"Jim!" His hand was already reaching out toward his Captain and friend before realization dawned. Abruptly, he pulled back. How dare he presume to lay a hand upon Kirk again...or any other Human.

"I assure you, Commander, the Captain is perfectly all right. He is just exhausted from the mental battle the two of you waged to overcome Mitchell's tampering with your biology."

"I did not..." He faltered, recovered. "Did I harm him in any way? Physically?"

"No, sir. Not at all."

Spock felt relief wash through him like a tidal wave.

For a moment, he lay unmoving, doing a thorough self-check. "The Captain was correct. It was not real. All of it was induced."

"Yes, sir. Mitchell has his mind set on destroying the two of you in any way that he can. He's quite the spiteful child. Until he is captured and returned to my people, all of us must be on our guard."

Spock shifted from the inward self-examination to focus on her. "Ensign, the first time... in my cabin. What went on between us. I have no memory of it. If I owe you an obligation..."

"None whatsoever, sir."

There was a moment's silence between them.

"Ms Z/N..." He paused, then ventured - "Zsazara."

Her eyes widened ever so slightly at the personal address.

"I do not know the customs of your people in these matters. Are you... word-bonded to anyone?"

"No, sir."

Spock took a breath. "I am not... familiar with your needs and requirements. However, if it would not offend your sensibilities, I ask that you and I consider becoming each other's consort." There. He had said it. It was done. If she became angered at his proposal, he would attribute his outrageous request to the lingering trace of madness still in his mind and body. But if she accepted...

This particular issue had stood unresolved for so long that the thought of having it settled would be utter satisfaction.

The Cygnetian sat motionless, looking absolutely bemused.

"Why would you want to do that with me, sir?" she asked finally.

Spock found that he had no words to answer her.

"If you are under the impression that we were physically intimate back in your cabin earlier, I assure you no such thing happened."

"But... "

"My people are perhaps the galaxy's best experts when it comes to biological manipulation and control. I am able to hold at bay the violence and the urgency of your mating drive as easily as you might hold a flower," she explained.

He stared at her, unable to believe.

On an impulse, Zsazara removed the liah on her belt. She reached over and gently pressed it and a tiny dangling chain into his left hand.

"Let your mind, heart and soul be at peace from this day forward, Spock of Vulcan," she intoned solemnly. "Wear this, a gift of control, a psionic creation of my family's, and never fear your biological nature again."

For a moment, Spock felt the Vulcan in him rebel: to tamper with the very foundation of his heritage? No. It was unthinkable. Almost, he threw it back into her face, so great was his revulsion. But a glance at Kirk, who lay sleeping peacefully, and the realization that he need never fear harming his Captain and friend again while in the blood fever was too much to refuse - at least, not without some serious investigation.

"I... will consider it," he answered, lifting up the tiny six-pronged crystal to gaze upon it. He had worn this once before and knew that its power was awesome.

The Cygnetian smiled and nodded, as if she had expected no other response.

"Be assured, the liah will more than equal your passion for research and your curiosity."

"Will it work for me as I have observed it working for you? Will it give me powers similar to yours?"

"If I let it, yes. But not powers like mine exactly. Your mental and physical self could not handle the bio-psionic output. Also, the liahs are designed to work symbiotically only with a female, not a male. A male can only use a liah if he has a female acting as mediator."

"Fascinating," he murmured, favouring her with a look that she could only interpret as speculation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

McCoy drew a deep breath of satisfaction, his blue eyes filled with warm affection as he looked upon his two patients.

Kirk lay reclining in one bed, his tousled light brown hair giving him a boyish look, his hazel eyes bright and content.

To the Captain's right sat Spock on another of the diagnostic beds.

"Well, as incredible as it seems, you two are in great health considering. Even the psyche profiles are well within normal range for each of you."

Spock got to his feet, obviously preparing to leave.

"And just where do you think you're going, Mister?"

"To the bridge. I am on duty in ten point five minutes."

"Oh, no you're not. You've just been through..."

"May I remind you, Doctor, you just reported me in perfect health, both physically and mentally."

McCoy had the grace to mumble, "Me and my big mouth."

Kirk smiled at both his friends. His delight was in the wondrous joy of being alive and well. That and the simple confirmation of his faith in Spock and their friendship. This time around, even in plak tow, the Vulcan had retained enough awareness of who he was to internalize the violence rather than let it loose upon his Captain.

Spock's dark eyes rested upon Kirk a moment. There was no missing the relief shining in those alien depths.

"Captain. Doctor." The Vulcan inclined his head in formal farewell and departed.

The second McCoy felt sure that the Vulcan was far enough out of range not to overhear, he turned to look at Kirk, his feature's set in an expression of annoyance and worry.

"What is it now, Bones?" Kirk responded good-naturedly.

"Jim. Are you planning on being Spock's punching bag every time he goes out of his head?"

Kirk's relaxed mood began to fade. "If necessary. He is my friend."

"Well, I'm his friend, too. But if this keeps up, sooner or later he's going to kill you."

"No. We'll... find a solution. Before there's a next time."

McCoy grunted. "And just how do you plan on going about it? Not through me, I hope. I'm not a miracle worker."

"No. But I suspect that Ms Z/N is," Kirk answered quietly.

"I knew it." The Doctor folded his arms in the manner of someone about to drop a bombshell.

"You knew what?"

"Jim, doesn't it strike you as odd that Ms Z/N seems to be the answer to all our problems? This girl shows up out of nowhere, with a lot of history that she's extremely vague about, and in less than two months she's moving in on all our personal lives and relationships. And now, I suspect, you're thinking of playing matchmaker between her and Spock. Are you sure you want your First Officer and best friend involved with such an unknown?"

Kirk's feelings of well-being evaporated.

"Bones... "

"Yes, Captain?"

But there was really nothing else to say, for the Captain of the Enterprise knew that his Chief Medical Officer was absolutely right.

"Chris."

Chapel looked up from her work to find Zsazara standing in the doorway of her work lab.

"Hi, Zsa."

"May I come in?"

"Well, I'm kind of busy right now."

"I won't take up too much of your time."

The Head Nurse hesitated, but she could think of no polite way to tell the Cygnesian that she simply could not deal with her for a while.

"All right. Come in."

Zsazara came to stand beside and just behind her, looking over the blonde woman's shoulder at her research.

"You had something you wanted to tell me?" Chapel encouraged, feeling more uncomfortable with each passing second.

"It concerns the Commander, Mr. Spock."

"Well, that's not surprising. You have been spending a lot of time with him lately."

"Yes. But only to help him. It is one of the reasons for my being here. To help."

Chapel looked up at that. "Help who? And to do what?"

"As you know, Mr. Spock and my mentor, Number One, are friends. She, Captain Pike and Mr. Spock became very close during their mission years together. To her and Captain Pike Mr. Spock needed a

lot of... care and understanding."

"Oh? Really." Chapel pretended mild disinterest.

"They, like Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, also care a great deal for this ship and its crew. As such you must understand that these are my main concerns. I... Chris, I am not... romantically interested in anyone, especially our senior officers. Certainly not Mr. Spock."

"Oh, really? And why is that?"

"Chris, as I said earlier, I am a Zamarian, or what you would call an Amazon. That means I come from a culture that - historically - has only known abuse and slavery at the hands of men."

Her interest no longer a pretence, Chapel put aside her work and gave the Cygnetician her full attention. "Zsa, I didn't know that. No wonder you're having such problems with Sean."

"Yes." Zsazara sighed. "Sean. I must speak with him next."

Chapel reached out to lay a sympathetic hand on Zsa's arm. "You spoke of abuse and slavery..."

"I have never known such, but all the generations before me in my bloodline have dealt with it in one way or the other. Because of that, Chris, I am incapable of... what you would call normal, healthy feelings between a male and female." At the Nurse's unspoken query, she clarified. "No. I'm not a... lesbian, either. I'm just not interested in it either way. Chris, in my race's time-span, I'm a child. I am only just beginning to learn to 'care' about the well-being of my fellow beings. I suspect that I'm a long way off from 'falling in love' with someone."

Chapel nodded, becoming all concern and understanding as her profession dictated. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"That's just the point, Chris. I don't feel like I need any help. I am quite content to be the way I am." Zsa paused a moment, as a mischievous twinkle suddenly sparked to life in her eyes. "And from the way you've been acting since you found me in Mr. Spock's cabin, I strongly suspect that you, also, will find some degree of contentment in my 'abnormality'."

In spite of herself, Chapel chuckled. "I guess it is pretty obvious."

"Yes. It is."

For a moment, the two simply looked at each other, silently acknowledging the restoration of their fledging friendship.

"Well, I am the way I am," Chapel said finally. "I can't help the way I feel."

"That is the point upon which womankind and my kind differ. You can help the way you feel - more than you know. The aspect of the matter is that most of us choose to feel the way we feel, but we bury that choice so deep in our subconscious that we convince ourselves that it's beyond our control. That it's somehow inborn, instinct, and such."

"Hey! Who's the physician around here?" Chapel demanded laughingly, albeit secretly she felt herself wince (and rebel) at Zsa's assertions.

"Dr. McCoy is," Zsa shot back, straightening to leave. "Well, that's all that I had to say. I'd better find Sean."

"All right," Christine said in farewell, adding: "Ah... Zsa. Thanks."

"You are welcome, Chris."

On the bridge of the ENTERPRISE, Spock found himself beset by an uncommon affliction - restlessness.

The impulse to find Zsazara and speak with her further rested strongly upon him. As if possessed of a mind of its own, his hand reached up to touch the spot where the tiny crystal lay against his chest beneath his tunic.

Seconds later, he let his hand drop.

The Ensign was otherwise occupied. Drawing a deep breath, Spock bent over his science station's viewport and tried to focus his full attention upon his work. But a tiny voice at the core of his being would not be silenced. Its words spoke of things most painful to him. Things like the simple fact of Zsazara's refusal to even want to consider him as a consort...

First T'Pring had rejected him. And now...

Zsazara sat beside Sean in the privacy of his cabin.

"Is that better now?" she asked.

"Yes. Much." He sighed. "Thank you."

"You are welcome - but don't forget that I'm the one who did it to you in the first place."

"I haven't forgotten."

Silence settled between them.

They were alone together in his quarters and had been so for the last half-hour. She knew, as did he, what the rest of the crew would make of that.

"Does it matter?" she said. "Before my attack on you in sickbay, you had most of this crew convinced that we were having sex together, anyway."

He had the grace to look embarrassed. "I'm sorry about that. I'll... correct it, starting right now. No more bragging about my conquests - real and/or imagined."

"Mostly imagined," she commented and was instantly sorry. "Sean. I do not mean to accuse you of being unmanly. It's just that I simply cannot comprehend how you Humans... become so intimate

with one another on such short notice and with little or no justification other than a... 'great body'."

"Well, I'd certainly like to teach you," Sean offered, unable to resist old habits. He reached to put an arm about her shoulders, and was surprised when she permitted it.

"You understand that you are my first attempt at this 'boy meets girl' ritual?"

"Yes." He recalled what Mitchell had said about her in the turbolift.

"Another thing you must understand and accept. There will be no sex between us, Sean."

He stiffened and pulled away.

"Sean, I don't know if you or anyone else on this ship can understand this, but sex has been used as a... weapon against my people for such a long, long time that it is next to impossible for some of us to think of it as an expression of... affection, love and commitment. Those words get used with the act all the time, but the actual delivery of those three are few and far between."

"But, Zsa, sex doesn't have to have anything to do with those things. Sex can be shared for no other reason than it is pleasurable."

"No, Sean. Not for my people. Not for me. I am not able to give so intimately of myself and then walk away. I get involved. I need those three... requirements or else I see the encounter as nothing but a cheap, self-gratifying act of exploitation. No matter the words, no matter the lovely, romantic circumstances, it is just that."

"But when two people mutually exploit each other for the pleasure of it, what's the harm?"

Zsa shook her head sadly. "With my people, the harm is often fatal. Indulging one pleasurable impulse at a moment's notice can easily lead to indulging another."

DePaul felt a chill run up his spine at her tone.

"What impulse is that?"

"To kill," she said simply.

"What...?"

"That history of abuse and slavery that I mentioned earlier. Sean, there were generations of it. Centuries. And on so many worlds, in so many cultures. The consequences of that..." She faltered. "You have no conception of the hatred that was born out of that. And the retaliation that we took."

He looked at her for a long moment in silence.

"You've... killed people."

"I am from a race of killers, Sean. To kill a man is as natural and easy for me as... as sex is for you, and probably just

as pleasurable."

"Oh, God," he breathed, fighting against the impulse to flee from her presence.

"Yes. God. He was my people's salvation," Zsa said.

"Uh? I don't understand."

"It was my mother's doing. She took this male captive and was well on the way to... doing what we do with such men."

"Use them for breeding and then killing them," Sean filled in.

"Yes," she admitted. "But my mother... Well, she had been associating with the women refugees who seek protection in our culture. Many say that is where the contamination began."

"Women refugees? Contamination?"

"Among my people, there are two kinds of females: the warriors and the women. A warrior is just that. She's bred and trained from birth to fight, to protect, to kill. The women are like the kind of females that you are used to. They come to the warriors, seeking protection and a safe place to live and raise their offspring."

"This is incredible." Sean shook his head in disbelief. "I never even imagined... Who would have believed that a... "

"Bunch of females would become so fanatical as to flee from their homeworlds to seek out, find and colonise a world of their own?" It was Zsa's turn to finish his sentence.

"Er... yes."

The Cygnetian shrugged.

"Let me get this straight. Where you come from - which isn't Cygnet XIV - there are women who are... "

"Normal." Zsa supplied and smiled. "Yes."

"And they bring their kids: their daughters and... "

"Sons."

"So you do have men in your culture."

"Of course. I have two very handsome younger brothers."

"Imagine that. I'd like to meet them. It would be... quite an experience to meet a guy raised in a culture created and run by women who... think of them as the scum of the universe. What is it like? A reverse of the abuse and slavery?"

"Once. Not any more. As I started to explain earlier, my mother... for lack of a better explanation, became attached to this one captive... "

Sean grinned. "We call it 'falling in love'."

"'Falling'?" Zsa frowned, unable to comprehend the relevance of such a term in the situation.

"Go on. Your mother fell... became attached to this male captive and..."

"She couldn't bring herself to kill him, even when he had clearly served his purpose."

"Purpose?"

"Mother was two months pregnant with my older sister, Gsazara."

"Oh." Sean felt that chill again.

"So... Unable to kill him and not willing to give him to any of the other warriors, she kept him and eventually they started to talk to each other. Being a deeply religious individual, he talked a lot on that topic: God. The Universe. The reason and purposes of people, places, things. Through him, and as time went on, Mother found that men... that some men were not the mindless, hormone-driven demons that her generation had been led to believe. She became very fond of him and refused to kill him even when Grandmother insisted." Zsazara became very quiet for a long moment. "Grandmother did not take well to being defied. It eventually led to a... civil war of sorts. Out of which came our new way of looking at and dealing with men."

Zsa stopped and the silence settled between them again, only this time it was not filled with Sean's fear.

"There's a lot to learn about you, lady," he said finally. "An awful lot. I'm probably crazy for doing this, but... I think I'll hang around you a little while longer. And somehow, in spite of your old-fashioned notions about sex, I don't think I'll be bored." (That, of course, did not mean that he intended to play celibate along with her. Only that he, being who and what he was, felt confident that eventually he would be able to persuade her to his way of thinking.)

"Thanks, Sean." She gave him a dazzling smile, paused a second, and then on an impulse kissed him full on the mouth.

Automatically, he tried to put his arms around her to draw her closer, but she quite literally melted in his embrace until he held empty space.

"What..." He looked up to find her standing near the door. "Zsa..."

"How about dinner at 1800 in the mess hall?" she asked.

"It's a date."

Her smile brightened even more. "Great. I've never had one of those either." And then she was gone.

Sean sat motionless on the bed, staring at the closed door. "Well," he murmured. "It's a beginning."

EPILOGUE

Later on that same day, McCoy permitted an ensign into sickbay to deliver a message from Starbase 11. It was marked for the

Captain's eyes only.

"Well?" McCoy demanded when Kirk gave him the OK to join him in the private alcove which had been set aside for the use of the ship's commanding officer while his body healed from the 'accident' in the gym. (Though Kirk had protested that he could recuperate just as well in his cabin, no one had listened. This had been Mitchell's second attack and one was taking any chances, most especially D'Lorraine Larzen. On her order, backed by Commander Spock, two security guards stood on the other side of the wall panelling.) "What did it say?"

"In a nutshell: 'Mind your own business, space jockey, and leave the politics of cultural relations to us'."

"What? You mean, Starfleet knows all about our Ms. Z/N and her mysterious origins? And they intend to do nothing?"

"It would seem so."

McCoy found himself speechless.

"Only ten more months," the doctor intoned finally, "and then it will all be over. Only ten." Turning away, he walked back to his office.

Kirk watched him go, sadness in his hazel eyes.

"Yes. Only ten more months," he murmured. "And then what?" A feeling of gloom settled about him.

Spock left the bridge and went to his cabin. He found Zsazara waiting for him.

"Ms. Z/N."

"Commander. Did you wish to speak to me?"

The Vulcan hesitated. "No, Ms Z/N. I do not."

She stood looking at him a moment. Then, she inclined her head in respectful farewell and turned to go.

Just as he was about to enter his cabin, he felt her mind-voice speak to him.

Commander. About that proposal. If it was possible, you'd be my first choice. As it stands now, by the time I'm ready for such a relationship you will belong to another. Peace, and long life, sir. You deserve it.

He turned to search for the Cygnetian, but she was already gone.

Minutes later, Spock sat at the desk in his cabin, with fingers steepled before him, meditating...

There was much to think about, much to consider. True, outside forces had tampered with his mind and body, but that was not enough of an excuse for the blatant emotional displays he had been letting slip through lately. Something needed to be done, and soon, or he



would lose himself.

No Vulcan could afford to let that happen.

His thoughts settled upon the psionic device hanging about his neck. Instinct whispered of a whole new world of possibilities there in that little jewel. But was it proper for him to accept such a side lane when he had chosen the path of Surak?

The Vulcan in him insisted that he give the psionic crystal back. But the Human in him was adamant. The liah was an unknown and was that not his reason for being out here in space, on this starship - to investigate the unknown?

And could it really be true? Was he truly free of pon farr? And if he was, dare he be glad about it? What were the repercussions?

Jim. The mere thought of the Human filled him with warmth and affection. *T'hy'la.* You are safe now. Safe from me and my madness.

And I... I am at peace. I have time now. Time and control.

He would explore, just a little.

In sickbay, Jim Kirk stirred restlessly in his sleep.

Invisible to the nurse and guards on duty, Mitchell stood over the Human. Cautiously, he reached out mentally to intrude on his old friend's dreams, searching for another way to hurt.

There was a sizzling clash of psionic energy.

WHAT...? Mitchell recoiled in shock. Not what, but... WHO?

It was that Vulcan/Human half-breed!

"Zsazara!!!" he screamed. "How dare you! How dare you give him access to the powers in your liah."

For a moment, Mitchell's rage knew no bounds.

Of all the insults! During his three year stay with the Z/N family, he had come to understand the great potential contained in one of those crystals and to look upon the psionic modulator and its technology with great envy. And if he could get hold of one that had been attuned to accept his pattern - like Zsazara had just done for Spock - he felt sure that with his new esper powers he could figure out how to duplicate it to work symbiotically with a male's bio-psychology. Then he would be a match for any warrior in the Sisterhood, including the Z/Ns. His desire to possess one almost equalled his desire to possess the warrior queen, Gsazara.

But hadn't he just learned yet again that his emotional tantrums got him nowhere, except close to being caught? In fact, Zsazara was probably sensing him right now, getting a fix on his position. She would be teleporting in here any moment. He had better go.

Gary. Zsazara's mind-voice touched him.

Mr. Mitchell. Spock called to him at the same time.

"What?" he answered, pointedly addressing only Zsazara.

But the message that he received from both the Cygnetician and the Vulcan was said in unison:

STAY AWAY FROM OUR CAPTAIN.

Defiantly, Mitchell started to reach for Kirk again, only to abandon the attempt when he sensed the psionic build up of two powerful mind-shields directed against him.

Cursing, Mitchell withdrew. He would come again another day, another time, and in a way that none of them would expect.

Very good, Commander, Zsazara complimented. You learn fast.

Thank you, Ms. Z/N. I am honoured.

Sir?

Yes?

I'm... I am going to try getting involved with this courtship ritual of the Humans. I will be... practising with Sean. Sir, Christine is my friend and she really wants a chance to be...

Yes. I know what Miss Chapel wants. It... is not possible.

Oh. Zsa sighed. She had been about to suggest that she and the Vulcan perhaps do a little... what did the Humans call it...? double dating... together.

Well, good evening, sir.

Good evening, ... Zsazara.

Spock took a moment to make sure that his Captain was resting peacefully before returning to his meditations.

Yes. The liah might be one way to deal with his growing predisposition toward emotionalism. But there was also... the high plateau of Gol on his homeworld, Vulcan. There he could approach the Masters and seek the cleansing discipline of Kolinahr.

Gol and Kolinahr.

It would mean leaving his Captain and the Enterprise.

Could he do that?

He would have to ponder on it more.

In the cabin which she shared with Larzen, Zsazara settled herself in preparation for her sleep period. She extended her senses and set them on automatic to alert her if anything out of the usual occurred on the ship while she rested.

For a fleeting moment, she touched minds with the Vulcan again, then moved on.

She had done all that she could.

It was up to him now.

No. It was up to all of them. The Captain. Mr. Spock. And Dr. McCoy.

One way or the other, they were each approaching a new beginning in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

REFERENCE MATERIAL: Star Trek TV series
'Bethany's Sin' - a novel
'AMAZONS' - TV movie
King James version of the BIBLE